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The Washington Monthly

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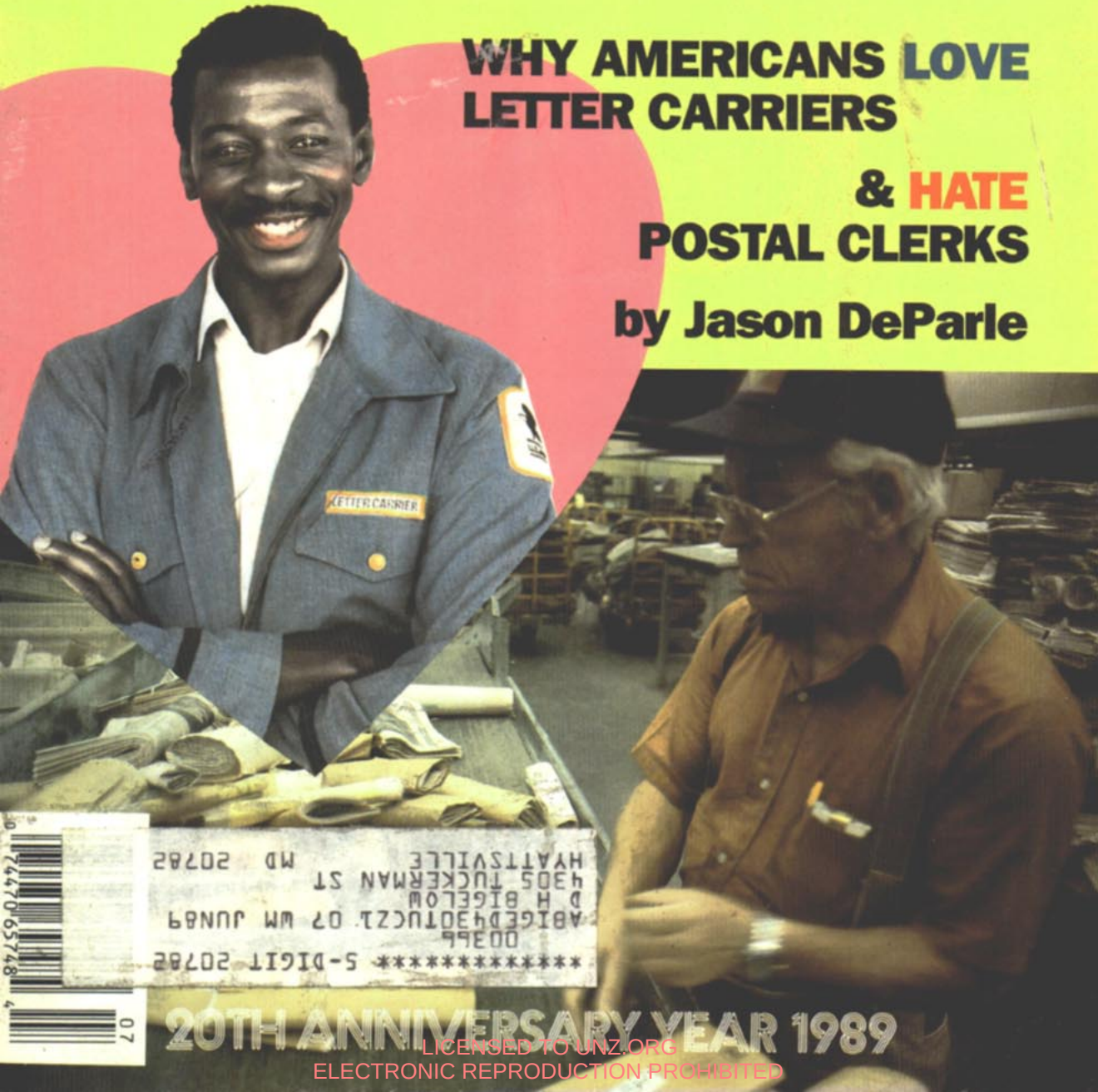

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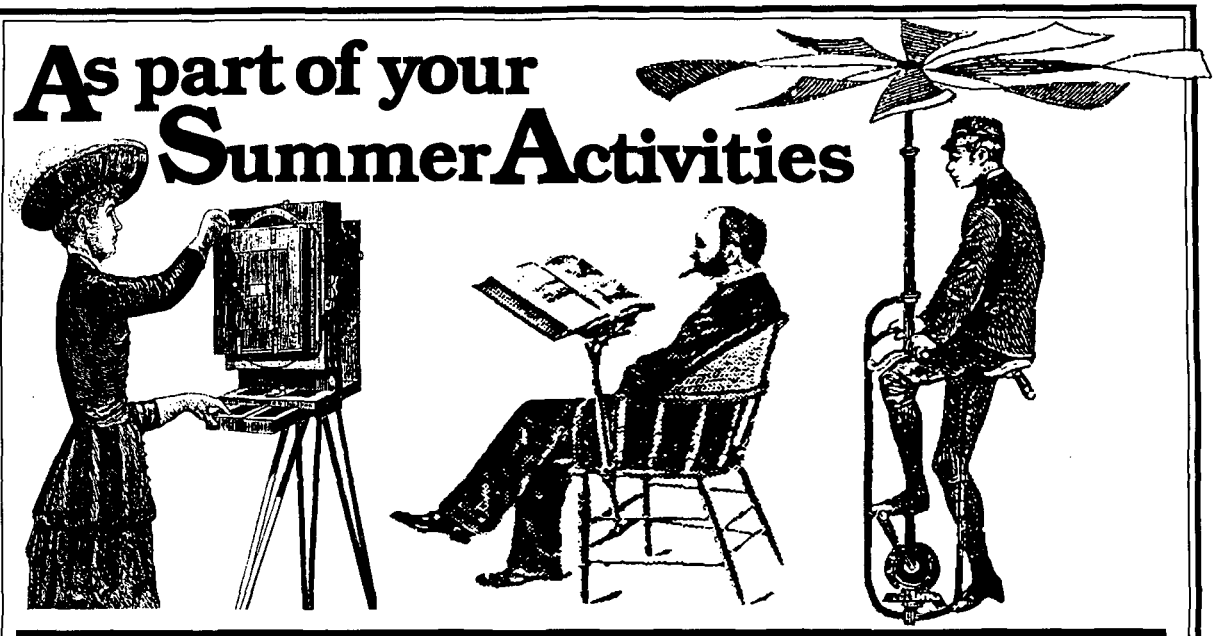

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LETTERS

How to drink milk

Not satisfied with finding me wrongheaded on the issue of abortion ["Beyond the Legal Right," April], Jason DeParle wants me to be deceitful, too. Thus, if I call the fetus a baby, I must secretly think it has a right to be born, when all I demonstrate is that I speak English, like the blind person who says "I see" or the atheist who says "good God!"

DeParle tasks me with failing to deal with the ethics of abortion. I thought I talked of little else. But as I explained to him six or seven times to no avail, we are working from different premises. He sees the fetus and the pregnant woman as persons whose rights conflict because one happens to inhabit the other, like a tenant and an apartment. I see pregnancy as a relationship between one person and a dependent, potential person. Thus, I find no contradiction between being prochoice (only actual persons have a right to life) and pro responsible pregnancy: one doesn't drink milk for the fetus, who needs no bones, but for the baby, who will.

KATHA POLLITT
New York, New York

I've never seen *The Silent Scream*, and I haven't spent a lot of time contemplating how much pain fetuses suffer when they're killed.

But every week I read "Sunday's Child," a shopping service in the *Boston Globe* that tries to find homes for unwanted children. These are real human beings, with flaws—borderline intelligence, Tourette's syndrome, severe emotional problems, etc. Nobody wants them, so they're advertised every Sunday in hope that they can find a home.

These children haunt me far more than the fetuses who've never seen the light of day. The fetuses have never smiled for a camera, never known the desperation of abuse and homelessness, never been hungry for a parent.

Do the right-to-lifers adopt these unwanted children? Do they sign up to offer a lifetime of support for the kids who will never be able to function on their own? Do they take babies born to AIDS victims in their homes as foster children?

No. The right-to-lifers are not willing to take the burden of the consequences of their success as a movement. And until they do, I'm afraid the moral rightness of the abortion issue still rests with the feminists.

VICKI MEAGHER
Marlboro, Massachusetts

Now that the sex habits of teenagers and the abortion controversy are news, let us note that a satisfactory solution to the questions of birth control and abortion is at hand.

Let every young man make a deposit in a sperm bank (actually, two or three) upon attaining sexual maturity. Then let him have a vasectomy. Pregnancy worries then disappear. When a child is wanted, it is a minor matter to make a withdrawal from the sperm bank and use artificial insemination. The procedure is tried and true; it is widely used for cattle.

The costs should probably be borne by the general revenue fund, otherwise those most in need will be priced out. Two or three banks in different cities should be used. You would hate to lose your future family to a power failure. The procedure can be voluntary, it need not be mandatory.

Every child a wanted child. That may be as near to utopia as we can come in this world.

ARTHUR D. PENSER
Huntsville, Alabama

Sects without guilt

In "Tilting at Windmills" [March], you suggest that those who oppose your ideas on national service do so "to protect themselves from guilt" and explain that they "had a self-interest in believing that there is no such thing as a duty to serve."

Attempting to psychologically analyze those who disagree with you may be interesting, but at the end of that particular path lies the notorious Soviet practice of defining anyone who disagrees with you as having something mentally wrong with him.

JOEL S. DAVIS
Albuquerque, New Mexico

The greencarding of America

Regarding Charles Peters's comments about hiring of foreign nationals at American embassies ["Tilting at Windmills," May], you may add the following to the list of objections: Foreign nationals will often be ignorant of the United States and its laws. This means that they will be of no help at all to people seeking information. I was involved in such a situation many years ago. I was traveling with a friend who lived in the United States but was a British citizen. Her passport and alien registration card were stolen. The British replaced her passport, but the question remained of what to do about the lost green card. The foreign personnel who manned the front desks at the American embassy knew

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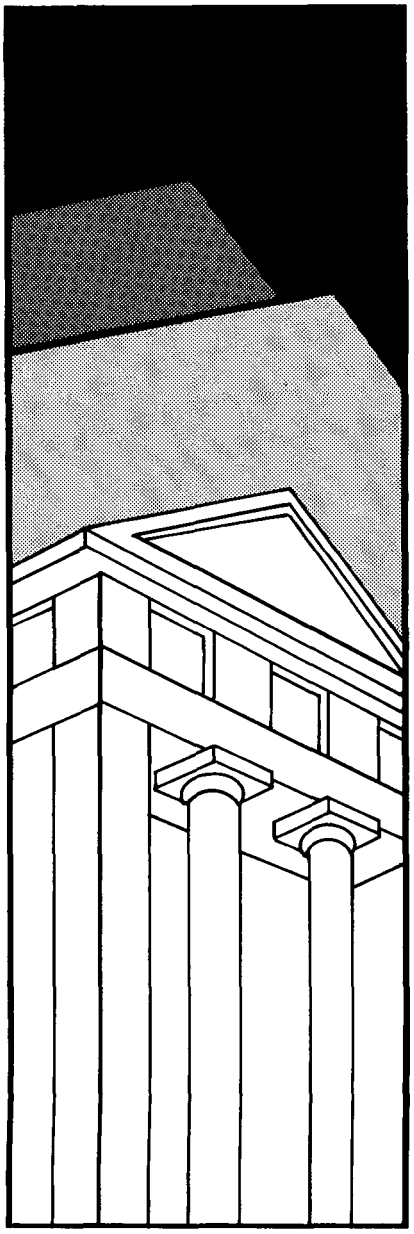

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nothing about green cards, permanent residents, or any other such nonsense. She came back from her visit to the American embassy convinced that she would never see her family in the U.S. again.

If the staff at the embassy had been familiar with our laws and customs, the whole thing would have been handled easily. In other words, they should've been Americans.

LORRAINE H. FRANZ
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Books cost bucks

I have a feeling that Ms. Rose's piece ["The Impossible Life of a College President," March] was designed as a frame for an already painted picture, i.e., the editor's agenda for the generic college president. The approach taken was bound to be, at best, superficial, and in truth quite unfair. A college president's days are not all alike. In the case of Mrs. Dunn, there are many hours of many days spent grappling with large issues such as the examination of the role of a liberal arts college in an increasingly professionalized society, the unique challenges of a college for women, issues of curriculum, tenure and promotion, and recently, creating a design for institutional diversity. Of course, those meaningful hours and days are not for visitors because the deliberations require a degree of privacy.

The head of any institution cannot escape some responsibility for the financial security of that institution, which goes beyond pursuing the "next big deal." Ms. Rose, or perhaps the editors, have made "fundraiser" sound like a dirty word. To raise funds effectively, the asker must be able to justify and articulate the need. Furthermore, seeking financial support brings a college president in contact with the real world which can have valuable lessons for the Ivory Tower. The Smith College Capital Campaign appears to be headed toward a successful conclusion. The balance in the days of Mary Maples Dunn will shift. She will have more time for academic concerns and student affairs, but her own perspective will have been enlarged. I hope the same can be said for Julie Rose and her editors.

PHOEBE REESE LEWIS
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Bottles and throttles

Having just finished reading "Have One for the Runway" [David Nather, April], I find that I can hardly believe my eyes. It is incredible that a drunk is back in the pilot's seat because someone decided a federal district court did not have "standing." I guess the federal appeals court figures that, by the law of averages, none of them will be Morrison's passenger. Wait until they find out there is no law of averages.

The ALPA, the arbitration board, and the judiciary all failed their responsibilities miserably. No one wanted truth, justice, and honesty here. Everyone who could have made a difference just wanted to coddle a drunk. Doesn't everyone know by now that drunks are super-cons? A drunk won't stop until he has to stop. With everyone babying him, why should he stop?

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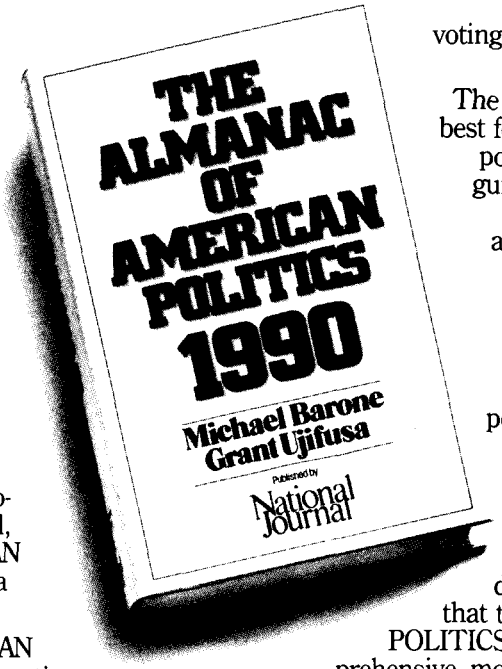

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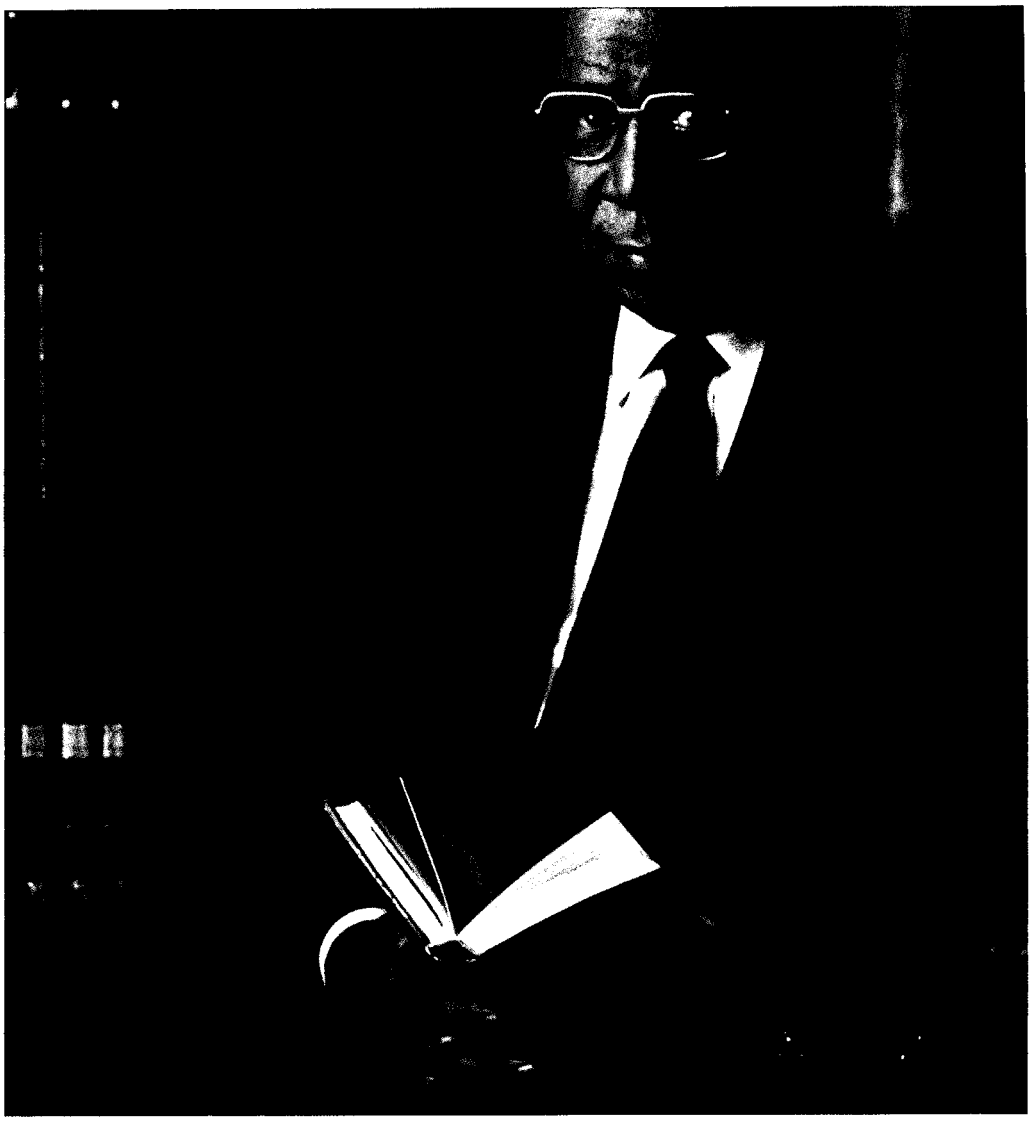
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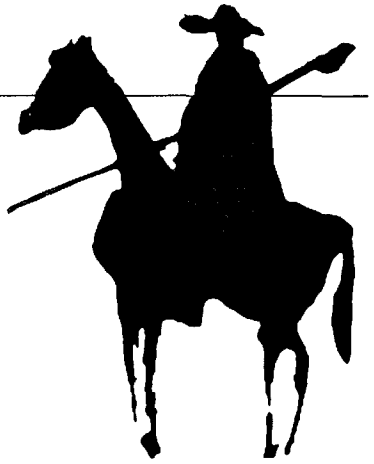

One of the stranger foreign policy outcomes in recent history occurred after the Iraqi Exocet missile hit the USS *Stark*. Instead of doing anything to punish Iraq, we intervened in the Persian Gulf war on its behalf. Now comes the news, from *Defense and Foreign Affairs Weekly*, that the Iraqi pilot who fired the missiles at the *Stark* was rewarded by his government with a Mercedes and 140,000 dinars (worth approximately $43,500 at the time)....

You may have heard that Dexter Manley, of the Washington Redskins, recently told a congressional committee that he had not learned to read until he was in his late twenties. If he couldn't read, why was he admitted to Oklahoma State University and why was he permitted to stay in the university and play football for four years?...

What issue is so important that the Columbus (Ohio) Bar Association is polling its members to ascertain their views? It is, according to a May issue of the association's publication, the *CBA News*, whether the site of its winter 1990 ski trip should be Snow Mass, Park City, or Vail. What isn't in doubt is that the trip will be tax deductible....

A couple of months ago I heard a boxing promoter reply to the American Medical Association's condemnation of boxing as a cause of needless death by asking, "Why don't they condemn helicopters?" He pointed out that far more people were dying in helicopter accidents than in the ring. He may have been wrong to defend boxing, but he was right to question the helicopters. So far this year in the Marine Corps alone, five helicopters have crashed, with a loss of 45 lives. Yet it seems only the boxing promoter—and the *Monthly* (see "All Aboard Air Oblivion," Gregg Easterbrook, September 1981, reprinted in February 1989)—speak out against the danger....

A continuing failure of American journalism is illustrated by the case of Dave Marash, an anchor on WRC-TV here in Washington. WRC does a good job of investigative reporting where criminal conduct is involved. But Marash wanted to do more. He wanted to find out why the local government wasn't working, why the schools didn't educate, why the homeless weren't housed—regardless of whether illegality was involved. He said the station's coverage expressed "an infatuation with what the mayor may or may not put up his nose rather than how he spends his day—the administration of his damn government, which is a shambles." It is typical of those in charge of journalism today that the people who run WRC didn't understand what Marash was talking about and he has resigned....

One of the most heartening aspects of the American reaction to the upheaval in China has been the resurgence of democratic idealism that cuts across the ideological spectrum. Among journalists, for example, from Mary McGrory on the left to R.W. Apple in the center to Evans and Novak on the right, there has been enormous frustration with the failure of George Bush and James Baker to articulate our commitment to the great ideals of the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights and our admiration for the Chinese students and workers who have risked their lives for these ideals.

The James Bakers who saw the uprising in China in Kissingeresque terms—as a threat to "stability" and to "American interests"—have

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lost sight of the inspirational force of the freedom and democracy that are our greatest gifts to the world. So have the American conservatives who have been too sympathetic to right-wing authoritarianism abroad and the liberals who have displayed too much sympathy for dictatorships on the left. The liberals' embarrassment at our shortcomings in achieving our ideals here at home and at our mistakes in attempting to intervene militarily abroad, combined with their fear of cultural imperialism, have led them to think it is wrong for us to advocate our ideals around the world. But what Russia and China are proving is that those ideals are universal in their potential appeal.

We tried to make this point in an article, "Exporting Idealism," by Harden Smith, in our April 1985 issue. It is also made by Gregory Fossedal in his new book, *The Democratic Imperative: Exporting the American Revolution*. Fossedal goes farther than I would, seeming at times to advocate outright intervention, but his basic message is on the right track. It's also incredibly timely....

Speaking of American ideals, one of the agencies that consistently seems to have trouble remembering them is the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

Take the case of Eleanor Palisoc, a native of the Philippines whom the INS is trying to deport. Her husband, a navy enlisted man, was killed in an auto accident in March. He had joined under a law enacted around the turn of the century that permits the U.S. Navy to enlist Filipinos. He had planned to make the Navy his career, and, at the time of his death, had already served eight years. How can we possibly justify telling his widow and two children that they can't continue to live in this country?....

Low income housing has not exactly been an area in which successful government programs have abounded. But three years ago an idea came along that has seemed to work. It is the low-income housing tax credit, which provides builders with substantial tax breaks in exchange for agreeing to rent at low rates for 15 years. According to *The Washington Post*'s Kirstin Downey, it "is now being used to build or renovate an estimated 242,000 housing units nationwide." Almost everyone agrees the program is a success. So what is the Bush administration doing? It is planning to terminate the program at the end of this year....

If you're worried about the bailing out of the savings and loans, consider that you're going to have to pay to fund government pensions too (see Matthew Cooper's article beginning on page 24). Then ponder the recent report of the inspector general of the Department of Labor, which finds that the $1.6 trillion in *private* pension funds is at risk because of poor regulation and inept enforcement of federal laws. How much of that sum will the taxpayer end up being asked to supply?...

Guess how quickly a person convicted of first degree murder in the District of Columbia can be eligible for release? Thirteen years and five months. Unfortunately, similar tenderness seems to be the rule in many other parts of the country. Take the State of Washington, where, at the age of 39, Earl Kenneth Shriner was let out of prison, even though he had murdered a 15-year-old retarded girl and in the words of one reporter, had also "savagely attacked, molested, and beaten at least seven other children." Following his release, he cut off the penis of a seven-year-old boy. In Maryland, a man was paroled after serving five years and three months of a 25-year murder sentence. He proceeded to stab to death two school children.

In California, the authorities were ready to release a convict who had served only seven years of a 12-year sentence for an attack upon a woman—he stabbed her 10 times—even though he had written a stream of threatening letters to her while in prison. His release was delayed at the last minute, but one suspects only because his victim was Theresa Saldana, an actress who is well-enough known that her protests of the release were aired by the press.

This tenderness toward violent criminals is one of the great shames of modern liberalism. Liberals seem unwilling to face the fact that there are some truly vicious people out there who must be kept in prison either to protect the rest of society or to adequately punish their crimes. They are right to feel sympathy for the thief who steals bread to feed a hungry family, and they are right to feel contempt for the conservative's indiscriminate harshness to the criminal, no matter how understandable his crime might have been—but the liberals are

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wrong to the extent that they are indiscriminate in their softness.

This problem has been dramatized recently by the case of ex-Speaker Jim Wright's assistant, John Paul Mack, whose brutal attack on a young woman was exposed by *The Washington Post* 16 years later. Whether the *Post* should or should not have run the article when it did, whether it would have been published were it not for the Speaker's trouble, is not my concern here. What was shocking to me, and I think to most people who read the story, was that Mack had been released after serving only two-and-a-half years. Vicious crimes such as his should never be punished so lightly.

Liberals must learn to distinguish between the Jean Valjeans and the John Paul Macks. That they are beginning to see the light is suggested by the outraged reaction of liberal women to the Mack case.

There is a practical as well as a moral reason to make a distinction. It is stupid to waste jail space on nonviolent criminals when there is not enough room for the violent, many of whom represent a real danger to the rest of us. For the nonviolent, punishment should, as much as possible, consist of restitution to the victim and mandatory community service. . . .

A foreign service officer was recently convicted by an American court of smuggling gold and is now in jail. But he's still receiving his government salary of $63,433 a year. Why can't he be fired? It seems there is a law that says foreign service officers can't be dismissed without a hearing. Hasn't he already received a hearing before a judge and jury and been found guilty beyond a reasonable doubt? . . .

We have frequently pointed out that our great universities are guilty of charging their students exorbitant tuition while overpaying an underworked senior faculty. What do the faculty big-shots do in their ample spare time? One thing they do is make more money. Consider the case of Robert Glauber, the Harvard Business School professor who is to be undersecretary of the treasury. Last year he made $755,000 in outside income, including $300,000 in consulting fees from Morgan Guaranty.

Glauber may be more artful than most in turning his spare time into fast cash. But legions of others enjoy light teaching loads and evince more interest in devoting their free time to entrepreneurial activity than they do in undertaking pure research, which was the justification for the reduced teaching loads in the first place. . . .

Ideological warfare has broken out on the intellectual right. On one side are the traditional conservatives such as Russell Kirk, and on the other, neoconservatives such as Norman Podhoretz. The neocons say the old right is prejudiced against Jews and the paleocons say the Podhoretzes tilt too much toward Israel.

I think both sides are correct. For years I've been wondering when the mostly Jewish neocons would wake up to the fact that they are disliked by the older conservatives. The American aristocracy, for example, has long practiced a policy of exclusion toward Jews, and anti-semitic jokes are still common in the locker rooms of WASP country clubs. On the other hand, the foreign policy of the neocons seems to consist exclusively of positions that are either anti-communist or pro-Israel, with almost no recognition that there are other problems in the world or that there is any justice to the Palestinian cause. . . .

In 1965 Dow Chemical introduced a new product called Sarabond, which it said could quadruple the strength of mortar used in brick construction. Well, if you live or work in—or just happen to walk by—a brick building erected since then, you'd better start saying your prayers. Sarabond, according to *The Wall Street Journal*, has been found to corrode "the steel of embedded bolts or other structural steel, causing facades to peel away and bricks to plunge to the street below." . . .

Dan Rostenkowski, the chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, is said now to be leaning toward the Bush administration's proposal to cut the capital gains tax, a proposal that he heretofore has opposed. The top rate has already been cut to 33 percent, so a further reduction seems unwise in light of the size of the deficit.

The real problem with the capital gains tax is that it makes no distinction in favor of long-term investment or between productive investment in new jobs and new plants on the one hand and trading of existing issues on the other. As for the long-term versus the short-term problem, why not start out, as Warren Buffett has urged, with a 100 percent tax on capital gains for

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investments held less than a year? In other words, the investor would be able to get his principal back if he sells in less than a year but he would get no profit.

This would effectively eliminate the focus on the short-term that has been a bane of American capitalism. After one year the tax would be 33 percent. But as a reward for productive investment, instead of mere trading, that rate could be lowered by 1 percent every two months so that at the end of 66 months, there would be no tax at all on investments that produce more jobs and better plants.

Maybe you already guessed that of the people who are killed on our streets and highways, 33 percent of the car and truck drivers have been drinking. But did you know that for bicyclists and pedestrians who are killed, the figure is 36 percent. And for motorcyclists, the percentage who have been drinking is 51?...

That we weren't insane to oppose the Vietnamese communists is suggested by the fact that the only nations that endorsed the crackdown in China were Cuba and Vietnam. That we *were* insane in the way we carried out our opposition is suggested by an excerpt from Paul Nitze's memoirs, *From Hiroshima to Glasnost*, scheduled to be published this fall. Nitze, it should be remembered, is not known for excessive solicitude for communists:

"Our 'harass and destroy' operations consisted of the indiscriminate use of artillery in the countryside, with Vietcong and villagers alike falling victim to the barrage.

"During a visit to the Mekong Delta region, where the Vietcong were deeply entrenched, I saw our artillery bombard the countryside with lethal fire. Within the hour I visited a hospital and watched while a parade of dying and injured children were brought in for treatment, the innocent victims of our indiscriminate barrage.

"This reflected the dark side of Lyndon Baines Johnson. General Krulak, a tough marine general who had fought at Guadalcanal and many other battles in World War II and killed many an enemy, came into my office one day after briefing the president. Krulak was visibly shaken. After being briefed on the difficulties the Marines were encountering in locating and engaging the Vietcong, the president had risen from his chair, his face dark with anger, and with his fist pounding the desk for emphasis, exclaimed: 'Kill the goddamn bastards, kill 'em, kill 'em, kill 'em!'"...

Richard Darman, like his former boss, James Baker, has long enjoyed a "most protected official" status with the Washington press corps. And for the same reasons: respect for his competence and gratitude for his leaks.

An example of how he benefits from media indulgence was provided in May by the case of the testimony of James Hansen, director of the Goddard Institute for Space Science. Hansen was planning to tell Congress that global warming was more of a danger than the administration wanted to believe. Darman's staff censored his testimony, but Darman escaped criticism even though he refused to testify before Congress about the episode.

An administration may legitimately enforce conformity of view as to the policies its employees recommend, but it should never keep them from providing Congress with the information it needs to assess the wisdom of those policies. In this case, Darman behaved in the tradition of Oliver North, and he deserved the same kind of criticism that the press gave North....

During my youth I dabbled in the world of the arts in New York. I was struck by how many of my fellow dabblers were more interested in being thought of as artists than in doing the work that artists do. The novelists who had not written a novel were legion. Equally common were the people like me, who accomplished just enough to be able to impress members of the opposite sex by saying we were in the theater. I was reminded of the way we were by an entry in the recently published *Andy Warhol Diaries*, in which Warhol says:

"I took the book of my old paintings out and saw all the clever things I used to do, and I just can't think of anything clever to do now."

What we, too, wanted to do most back then was to think of something clever, something that would impress the world enough to permit us to be regarded as artists. What we should have worried about was whether we had something to say, something we believed in enough and wanted to say enough that we would produce the work regardless of whether it would seem clever or would impress the world....

—*Charles Peters*

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Down and Out in Washington on $89,500 a Year

Congress isn't underpaid. The rest of Washington is overpaid.

by Jonathan Rowe

People knew him only as "The Xerox Man." His office, on an upper floor of the old Dupont Circle Building, was open until 10:00 or 11:00 at night. With the cheapest bulk rates around, it was a gathering place for the denizens of Washington's late-night public interest world.

He was a character out of Mark Twain: boyish face and ample belly, his business dress a tee shirt and Bermuda shorts. There were hustles in every drawer. An auto driveaway company, an estate liquidation business, and—his personal favorites—an escort service and outcall massage. The three telephones were constantly ringing. He loved to give indignant, jailhouse-lawyer disquisitions on the antisolicitation laws and the Mann Act and why the cops couldn't touch him.

His renegade spirit matched the decade perfectly. He bragged about rigging the meter in the Xerox machine to beat the leasing company. A true libertarian, he had model guns on the walls and never tired of telling how he once apprehended a bank robber and won a commendation from the police.

The Xerox Man isn't there any more. He seems to have drifted off into the night, along with the Washington he was part of. The Dupont Circle Building, once a haven for underfunded groups, now has an elegant, Hyatt-style entrance and rents to match. A few blocks down Connecticut Avenue, where impecunious Washingtonians once dined at Sholl's cafeteria, limousines now wait outside a palatial new building featuring Duke Zeibert's power restaurant. The Sholl's at Vermont Avenue and K Street is now Les Gals.

It's that way all over town. Eighteenth Street and Columbia Road, once a hub of inventive neighborhood activism, now sports a chic ethnic restaurant row. The cheap rooming houses and apartments in the West End have yielded to luxury hotels. Developers are greedily eyeing old neighborhood shopping areas along Connecticut and Wisconsin Avenues, and no one is safe from their highrise schemes.

Many have lamented the way PACs have corrupted the legislative process. But the invasion of high-paid corporate lobbyists has had another, more insidious, effect. It has made Washington a very expensive place.

As recently as the late sixties, Washington was still a sleepy southern city. Twenty dollars bought a book of 10 tickets to the Circle Theater. (A real estate development firm called George Washington University has since torn it down.) A $1.95 souvlaki at the Astor was a fine night out. The activism of the sixties took root here in part because it was the kind of city that could foster it. Although people complained about the lack of "culture," one could live on a modest income and not feel deprived.

Not any more. Low budget groups of the kind that flourished during the sixties can no longer afford the rent. Citizens who come to Washington to petition their government can't afford a hotel. (In a subsidy that rivals the perversities of the Internal Revenue Code, District hotels offer special corporate rates. Ordinary citizens without expense accounts are on their own.)

Jonathan Rowe is a contributing editor of The Washington Monthly.

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Worse, the new upscale Washington has aggravated the local self-pity index. People who used to feel reasonably well off now feel poor. Which brings us to the subject of congressional pay raises.

The so-called "Capital Beltway" syndrome is greatly overblown. People don't have to be in Washington to be parochial and short-sighted. But the battle over the recently proposed pay raise showed that, in at least one respect, the Beltway mentality is undeniably real. Washingtonians have a warped perspective on what it means to have enough.

Volvos and huts

The Washington establishment—conservative as well as liberal—could not understand why taxpayers would begrudge their poor, beleaguered representatives a decent wage. The average American worker, earning just under $21,000, couldn't understand why the politicians couldn't live on more than four times that much.

David Broder gave voice to the establishment pique when he accused pay-raise opponents of "Know-Nothing demagoguery" and chastised Ralph Nader, a leader in the fight, for "moralistic blackmail." Nader, meanwhile, was lionized throughout the nation, and with reason. Most Americans see no reason to feel sorry for people who make $89,500 a year, plus generous pension and medical plans, plus subsidized meals, WATS lines, free postal service, a health club, and a tax-free discount store euphemistically called the "House Stationery Store."

Still, buried in the pay raise fight was a real problem: It's not that members of Congress are paid too little but that the rest of Washington is paid too much. And that includes many in the media who rushed to Congress's defense. Surrounded by people who make much more than they do, members of Congress feel deprived even when they are not.

This is a regrettable American trait. When spotting the bloated salaries of their peers, Americans seldom argue that others make too much but rather that they make too little. Teachers compare their salaries to those of high-tech engineers; judges compare theirs to lawyers in private practice. Even corporate CEOs are subject to this. In a recent *Forbes* survey of high-paid executives, Allen F. Jacobson, head of 3M Corp., was asked how it felt to be making over $2 million a year. "I just want to get up to where the baseball players and rock stars are," Jacobson laughed. Joseph D. Williams, head of Warner Lambert, commented on his $6.4 million salary: "In the scheme of what goes on in this world, it's a very little bit of money."

This kind of thinking is a treadmill to bankruptcy if ever there was one. At some point, we have to ask whether the highest salaries are justified, not whether everyone else can match them. In Washington that point has come.

Consumption is, after all, social—in an industrial society people have wants, not needs. Even Karl Marx and Adam Smith agreed on this. Smith defined a necessity as "whatever the custom of the country renders it indecent for creditable people, even of the lowest order, to be without." Marx wrote of the owner of a small house who finds a much larger one going up in the neighborhood, "The house shrinks from a little house to a hut."

In Washington, it's quite easy to feel as if you're in a hut these days. The nation's capital has always been relatively well-off. Before World War II, it had more cars per person and a higher average income than any place in the country. But in recent years, the riches have become positively gaudy. "There is no other major American market that comes even close to ours in terms of spendable incomes," concluded a report for the Greater Washington Research Center. Washingtonians are about 70 percent more likely to buy Volvos than Americans generally. Virtually every toney store in America has opened a D.C. branch in recent years. "This has got to be the most affluent clientele we see anywhere," the president of Kay Jewelers told *The Washington Post*.

Washington doesn't have the monumental peaks of wealth of a Los Angeles or a New York. But the norm is extraordinarily high. Average household income, after tax, is more than $47,000 a year, 42 percent above the nation as a whole. Almost 9 out of 10 D.C. households own corporate stock. Unlike the wealth of most other cities, Washington's affluence practically never flags. When Detroit's auto factories slow down, and Texas oil prices fall, the affected corporations often spend all the more in Washington to get relief.

People don't feel bad when just the rich are rich. But when everyone else seems rich too, it starts to hurt. The sense of deprivation became especially bad during the Reagan years—which, not incidentally, is when the present pay raise push began. Carter's White House was full of people who had never seen the kind of money they were making in government. Reagan's crowd, by contrast, hadn't seen so little for a very long time. Asked by a reporter what the influx of Reaganites meant for the Washington real estate market, one broker beamed, "It means wonderful things."

$1,000 suits

The sense of deprivation is not entirely psychological, of course. All the money floating around Washington has made prices very high. In the greater metropolitan area, the average single-family house sells for around $200,000.

Of course, it's not just congressmen who have to contend with those price levels—bureaucrats and Xerox service reps do too. What's different is that members of Congress come to Washington expecting to find

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themselves near the top of the heap. Instead, they find themselves trying to run with a very expensive crowd. No longer viewing Congress as a temporary break from a law practice back home, they assess their prospects primarily in Washington terms. And the people they consider their peers—top lobbyists, lawyers, trade association heads—all make more money than they do. "It's hard for any politician to be expected to raise money on a personal basis when he's in a $200 suit, and they are in $1,000 suits," is how a friend of Tony Coelho, recently retired congressman and fundraiser, explained the feeling.

On any given night out, it's the member of Congress and his spouse who have to watch the right column of the menu. (Or else take the free meal from the defense contractor.) At any cocktail party in Georgetown or McLean, the member of Congress is likely to be the lowest paid.

Peanuts and parachutes

And not by a little. A survey of trade association heads by the *National Journal* showed that, for all the heat they take, it's not members of Congress who are living high off Washington's hog. Charles DiBona of the American Petroleum Institute gets $330,000 a year, as does Richard Lesher of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. Robert O. Anders of the Food Marketing Institute gets $406,000. James P. Mooney of the National Cable Television Association gets $559,000. And Jack Valenti of the Motion Picture Association gets $660,000. Valenti's salary alone would have paid the salaries of the entire congressional delegations from each of 22 different states, including Oregon, Arizona, Kansas, and Mississippi.

Lawyers in Washington can do even better. At Skadden, Arps, a partner's share of the earnings in 1987 was $885,000, according to Washington's *Legal Times*. At Fried, Frank, and Harris, it was $560,000. According to the D. C. Bar Association, the *average* Washington lawyer—including the criminal lawyers on 5th Street—makes $91,000, more than a U.S. senator.

This is nothing, moreover, compared to the relative deprivation members of Congress might feel when they look at the larger business world. When Dan Rostenkowski, the House Ways and Means Committee chairman, addresses a group of corporate CEOs, he's talking to men who average, according to *BusinessWeek*, more than $2 million a year.

If these sums seem like something out of Fantasyland, they're nothing compared to what you get for *running* Fantasyland. Michael Eisner, president of Walt Disney Inc., got $40.1 million dollars last year,

Abolish the Lobbyist Maintenance Tax!

Congress is itself to blame for much of the inflated affluence around it. PACs exist because Congress says they can. Trade associations have such large staffs in part because Congress, with its own large staffs, provides plenty of people for the lobbyists to talk to. Housing costs a fortune in part because the unlimited mortgage interest deduction makes it such an attractive investment. (But don't shed tears about the housing costs of Congress. A house in Washington may cost a fortune, but when it's sold, it yields an even bigger one—especially if it was purchased years ago.) Restaurants are so expensive in part because Congress said that lobbyists and businessmen could deduct their lunches.

In any recounting of Washington misdoing, the clinching line is inevitably that "the taxpayers pay for it." Yet these taxpayers also buy groceries and gas, employ doctors and lawyers, and thereby support the lobbying efforts of these groups, whether they agree with them or not. A portion of every dollar spent at the gas pump supports the American Petroleum Institute in Washington, as surely as another portion goes to support the maintenance of highways.

In effect that's a tax. Nobody asks the nation's motorists whether they want to contribute to oil lobbyist Charles DiBona's salary of one-third of a million dollars, or to the $50 million annual budget he oversees on behalf of the nation's oil companies, not consumers. Nobody asks the nation's insurance customers whether they want to contribute to a $50 million lobby, which works to maintain special favors—such as the antitrust exemption for insurance companies—that help keep insurance rates high.

Call it the Lobbyist Maintenance Tax. Anyone who doubts it is a tax—that is, who doubts it's compulsory—should set out tomorrow with the purpose of buying a gallon of gasoline, a watt of electricity, or a loaf of bread without paying it. One can usually avoid the sales tax by buying mail order, or avoid a state income tax by moving to New Hampshire. But the Lobbyist Tax gets you wherever you go. At least we can vote against the members of Congress we don't agree with. By contrast, the Lobbyist Tax compels us to support interest groups we don't agree with. We have no say in the matter at all.

The Lobbyist Tax also makes the whole economy less efficient. Frequently, companies get a greater return from the tax loopholes they achieve by supporting their lobbyists in Washington than they could by investing in machinery and equipment back home.

(continued on page 16)

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including stock options. His number-two man, Frank G. Wells, got $32.1 million. Together these two moguls could pay the salaries for all the members of Congress and *have $24 million left over*. Meanwhile, for all the heat Congress takes for presiding over an inefficient government, *BusinessWeek* judged Eisner to be among the CEOs giving their shareholders the least in return for their pay.

It's true that Reps. Dan Rostenkowski, Stephen Solarz, and other members of Congress elected before 1980 do get to keep whatever's left over in their campaign chests when they retire—sums that can reach upwards of $1 million. But as golden parachutes go, that's peanuts compared to the $53.8 million that F. Ross Johnson, the former president of RJR Nabisco, got after the buyout of that company.

It took 10 years for Jim Wright to bring in the $150,000 or so he stood accused of taking from his friend George Mallick. At the height of his career, Michael Milken, Drexel Burnham's indicted junk bond wizard, made that much in *36 minutes*. And then Congress has to sit there and listen to such executives demand tax breaks while bewailing their lot.

Safire's tower

Even reporters make more than congressmen these days. Not only the network anchors but lots of people you'd hardly recognize. Of the *Washingtonian*'s list of 50 top Washington reporters, two-thirds make close to $200,000 a year or more. This helps explain why nowadays the press tends to see the congressional pay raise issue in Beltway terms rather than lunchpail ones. When David Brinkley and George Will discuss the pay raise on the Sunday morning talk shows, they are looking down from the rarefied heights of their million-plus incomes, not up from the $21,000 national median. It is not surprising that Will is now bemoaning what he calls a "childish impatience with imperfection" and "miniaturized ethics" in Washington. Questions of benefits and compensation hit close to home.

Consider "honoraria," the politely named envelopes of cash that members get for showing up at industry events and imparting wisdom that could have been gleaned from *The Washington Post* for 25 cents. Journalists do the same thing. Obscure print journalists get from $2,000 to $5,000 per speech. Jack Anderson and Patrick Buchanan get $10,000 per speech. William Safire gets $18,000. Safire explained to *The Washington Post* that giving such speeches "gets you out of the ivory tower." If a journalist has lost contact with reality it's doubtful that an $18,000 speech to a well-heeled business lobby will restore it.

Asked to disclose these payments, some journalists have reacted like a congressman caught taking a secret

And even when Washington lobbyists aren't really able to provide that kind of financial edge, they can often convince their clients that they perform this service. The reason there is so much opposition to closing the slightest tax loophole is not that the industry in question would face ruin without it. It's that the lobbyists in question would face ruin if that industry didn't believe that the lobbyists stood between itself and ruin.

What the nation needs right now is not a raise in congressional pay but a cut in the Lobbyist Maintenance Tax. We need to shrink Washington's bloated influence sector, which drives up prices, corrupts the political process, erects a moat of affluence around the nation's capital, and makes everyone else—including members of Congress—feel deprived.

The Lobbyist Tax is a case of what economists call "market failure." People don't have enough information about it to make an informed decision in the marketplace. As a result, corporations can make them pay extra for something they may well not want.

In the interest of an efficient free market, therefore, Congress should require political content labeling. Under present laws, manufacturers must list the material ingredients of their products, so that customers know what they are putting into their bodies. Political content labeling would inform customers what their purchases put into the body politic.

It could work as follows. On the package or label, and in literature available at the point of sale, companies would list the amount of money they—and their unions—expend on political activities, including PACs. They would also provide an address to which customers can write for more detailed information. This would include the lobby groups that customers are supporting through their purchases, the amount of this support, and the main issues on which these groups have worked over the past three years. It would also include a list of PACs they have supported and of members of Congress to whom these PACs gave money. When Americans buy products at the supermarket they should know when their purchases are supporting Jesse Helms or Ted Kennedy, or any other politicians or causes. (There could be reasonable rules for small businesses, retail establishments, and so on, so that the system could be workable and not overly burdensome.) Because it would let consumers exercise control over political cash flow, political content-labeling could help drain some of the corrupting cash excess out of Washington.

—*Jonathan Rowe*

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loan from a Texas S&L. "I ain't talking," Sam Donaldson told *The Washington Post*. "My own personal business," said James J. Kilpatrick, who had written previously that it "smells to high heaven" when Congress takes such fees. "There is much to be said for letting people pay for what they are willing to pay for," wrote columnist Henry Mitchell in *The Washington Post*, in defense of honoraria for reporters, "and to let people gobble up all the cash they can. It's the American way." *The Washington Post*'s way, of course, is to lambaste any member of Congress who utters a thing like that.

Given the elephantine incomes of the Safires and Donaldsons and DiBonas and Valentis, it's no wonder the capital goes through periodic spasms of congressional mopes. Fortunately, the voters are around to restore some perspective to the congressional mind. What we need now is a way for the voters to restore some perspective to the rest of the city, which is where Washington's salary bloat is most insidious. (See "Abolish the Lobbyist Maintenance Tax," page 14.)

The nation needs a slimmed-down capital because a democracy itself is like a city—it requires low-rent districts in which to renew itself. Apple Computers started in a garage, not in the Trump Towers. Washington used to be that way. The old low-rent Dupont Circle Building spawned all kinds of movements and causes, from the Airline Consumer's Action Project to the People's Bicentennial Commission. Take a walk along 18th Street. At the corner of S Street was Stone Soup, a grocery collective that sold bulk grains and fresh produce at low prices and was a social center for the Dupont Circle community. Today a restaurant called Lauriol Plaza occupies the site. All the way up to Columbia Road, the story is the same. The Adams Morgan Organization (AMO) led the battles against real estate speculators in the seventies. It even forced the Perpetual American Bank to devote a part of its portfolio to neighborhood loans as a condition of agreeing to let the bank locate at 18th and Columbia. But AMO's shabby old storefront has been swallowed up by the restaurant row.

Nothing is going to bring back AMO or Stone Soup, or the Xerox Man, for that matter. They were part of an era, as well as of a city. But it's important that there be places in Washington for such endeavors to begin. High rents tend to exclude anything not already established—that is, the future—in politics as in business, in Washington as in any other city. The Washington that fosters a sense of deprivation in public officials is also a Washington that's bad for democracy. What seems to have escaped notice is that the demand for a congressional pay raise is only one symptom of this much larger problem. □

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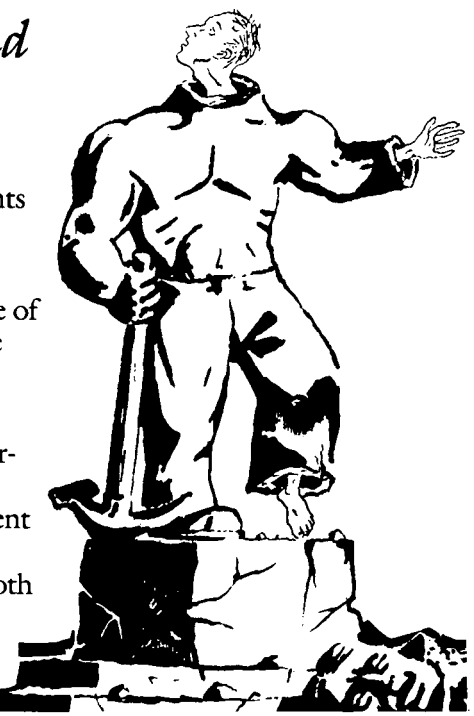

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What Lloyd Cutler Could Learn From Acme Widget

Target pay increases to jobs that are hard to fill.

by Barbara Frye

Imagine yourself the vice president in charge of personnel for Acme Widget, a large corporation with some 10,000 mid-level and senior employees. Looking over reports, you realize that Acme has consistently been losing some of its top research and development people to other widget companies. To make matters worse, you stumble over a similar pattern in accounts receivable: Acme can't seem to keep the few good accountants it manages to attract.

Suppose you hired a consultant who told you that the way to solve the problem would be to give *all* your mid-level and senior employees a 50 percent pay hike. You'd fire him.

As obviously bad as this consultant's advice is, Congress almost took it in January when it flirted with the recommendation of the presidential commission headed by Lloyd Cutler to dole out a 50 percent pay raise to some 10,000 federal employees. The Cutler commission's conclusion was the latest in a long tradition of responding to pay issues in *some* areas of government by calling for pay raises *across the board*. The problem stems at least in part from emphasizing the wrong aspects of government pay. Blue-ribbon pay commissions tend to think of government salaries primarily as indicators of status—their idea seems to be that congressmen, senior members of the executive branch, and judges deserve raises that bring their earnings closer to those of the businessmen and litigators they consider to be their social peers. This skewed reasoning has helped create a situation where 142,000 federal employees earn at least $50,000 per year. (Which in turn partially explains why more than 47,000 Washington households—nearly 19 percent—earn at least this much.) While a severe income differential between peer groups in and out of government can lead to a decline in the quality of government work, it's any such decline, rather than the peer considerations, which should be the guiding concern. When it comes to dispensing salaries, government's first consideration should be to put the money where it will do the most good—into jobs that are hard to fill or have high turnover rates.

To some extent, the government already uses salaries surgically. One-ninth of the government workers in the Washington area are currently drawing a higher-than-scale salary because they are in slots with a shortfall. And federal workers have long had their salaries adjusted for local variances in cost of living. In light of this, it's hard to understand why differential raises haven't been embraced as the correct answer to questions of government pay.

The tendency to overlook the vagaries of recruiting and retention obstructs understanding which of the federal job sectors could really benefit from extra wages. For instance, pay commissions should certainly recognize that the unique opportunities to affect policy

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some government jobs provide are rewards that considerably outstrip financial considerations. And when pay raise advocates claim that "the best people are leaving the government in droves," they rarely admit that many do so not because the salaries are so lousy but because the *pensions* are so *good*. The government-wide attrition rate—which includes retirements—is 8.7 percent, and that sounds serious, but the government-wide quit rate—which does not include them—is only 4.6 percent, hardly the stuff of crisis. In Washington circles the weapon of choice in salary discussions is the broad brush. It should be the fine point.

Health clubs and town cars

Now that we're clearer about *how* to think about government pay raises, we can turn to the question of *where* to think about them. In contrast to that across-the-board government quit rate of 4.6 percent, the quit rate in the federal judiciary is four-tenths of 1 percent, as is the quit rate for Congress (and that's including two congressmen who left not because the pay was so poor but because they had to go to jail). On the other hand, the quit rate at the Internal Revenue Service is 14.3 percent.

It's noteworthy that an April General Accounting Office report on federal slots vacant for 120 days or more cited difficulty in recruiting "particularly for those [positions] involving a high level of specialized technical or scientific expertise."

In other words, there is ample reason to think that while federal lawmakers, judges, and bureaucrats are paid a fair, even generous wage, there are clerical, technical, and scientific positions where pay raises make sense.

When members of Congress complain about the cost of living in Washington, they're right. In a recent survey of 19 major cities, Washington ranked as the fourth most expensive place to live. The same survey put the cost of health care in Washington at roughly 30 percent above the national average. And if you want to buy a house in the nation's capital, expect to pay 68 percent more than the average price for a house throughout the rest of the country.

So don't our boys in pinstripes and paisley deserve a raise? Well, not really. While the overall cost of living in D.C. is 27 percent above the national average, a member of Congress makes four times the average salary. And that's if you don't count the perks. But you should count the perks. After all, most Americans spend a lot of money every year on the things that senators and representatives receive gratis: medical care, parking, meals, postal service, newspapers, foreign travel, use of a health club, and long-distance telephone calls. Each member of Congress can have a WATS line installed in his or her home for free.

Congressmen can also dip into their campaign funds to pay some not-so-campaign-related expenses. For example, *The Washington Post* recently reported that Sen. Alfonse D'Amato used $684 a month from his campaign funds to lease a Lincoln Town Car. The *Post* also revealed that Sen. Patrick Leahy used $379 a month in campaign money to lease a car and another $1,323 for insurance premiums.

> The Cutler commission was the latest to respond to pay issues in *some* areas of government by calling for pay raises *across the board*.

Each year at tax time members of Congress can deduct $3,000 from their incomes for the expense of living in Washington. And when they retire, congressmen can enjoy the fruits of their legislation: one of the most generous pension plans ever devised. A congressman with 25 years' service can retire today with an annual pension of $55,000, whereas his counterpart in private life (a lawyer, say, making the same salary, whose firm has a privately managed pension fund) would typically retire on $24,000 per year—less than half as much. In light of these hidden plusses, some estimates put the real compensation of members around $135,000.

Even without a congressional pay raise, the current salary of $89,500 means a raise for most of 1988's new congressmen. According to the Capitol Hill newspaper, *Roll Call*, 22 of the 33 newly elected representatives earned salaries below that figure before their election.

While Congress has been showing us its empty pants-pockets, federal judges—who receive the same salary as congressmen—have been elbowing their way into the act too. In early March, only five weeks after the 50 percent pay raise proposal died, Chief Justice William Rehnquist called for a 30 percent pay increase for his colleagues on the federal bench. Admittedly, top-of-the-heap trial and commercial lawyers make much more than judges; but the federal judiciary draws heavily on government attorneys and academics, who do not. And having immense prestige, while wielding power unavailable in the private sector, is another powerful attraction. That's surely a big part of the

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reason that the federal judiciary is not losing judges at anywhere near the rate that, for example, our science agencies are losing researchers.

Plus, federal judges enjoy a little-known lucrative benefit. Rather than resigning, or even retiring, a federal judge can simply apply for "senior status," which means that he can continue to draw his full salary *while never hearing another case*. The real impact of this arrangement is not well understood. A lawyer in private practice who decides at age 60 to stop working while drawing an annuity as lavish as that available for free to a judge on senior status would have to pay at least $950,000 for it. What's more, if a judge on senior status hears one case a year, he receives any pay raises given to the fully active federal judiciary.

But even if judges were leaving the federal bench in significant numbers, there are lawyers lined up to replace them. In 1988 there were more than 700,000 lawyers in the United States. And they have plenty of motivation to move to the bench. According to the American Bar Association, the median annual salary for a lawyer in the U.S. is $68,900—$20,000 less than federal judges make.

Ph.D.s take phlight

Contrast this with the situation of the government's top scientists. Last year, Dr. Marc Lippman, the country's guru of breast cancer research, left the National Institutes of Health to become director of Georgetown University's Lombardi Cancer Center. And recently Robert Gallo, one of the codiscoverers of the HIV virus that causes AIDS, let it be known that he was shopping around after 22 years at NIH. Gallo was persuaded to stay, but his threats to leave were like a heart attack at NIH—not fatal but a symptom of a larger problem. An earlier sign of trouble was in 1981, when Dr. Philip Leder, a talented geneticist, left NIH to become professor and chairman of genetics at Harvard Medical School. Since 1983, NIH has lost a Nobel Prize-winning biochemist, a leading neurological researcher, and a number of leading cancer researchers and immunologists. In all, 42 senior scientists from NIH have gone to academia, industry, or private research labs in the past five years—getting salary increases ranging from 80 percent to 276 percent. And they've taken key laboratory personnel and years of research with them. When Lippman went to Georgetown he walked off with roughly 30 NIH scientists and technicians.

A recent study of why scientists leave government conducted by the National Institute of Medicine mentioned as reasons poor laboratory and office space, and a bureaucratic chain of command that discourages travel to international conferences. But most of all, the study cited the pay—it viewed the general salary pay cap of $77,500 for senior government researchers as a significant problem. The more senior the researcher, the larger the pay gap between government on the one hand and academia and industry on the other. At NIH, the senior research scientists with M.D. degrees make $89,000 a year. Compare that with their academic counterparts: according to the latest figures from the Association of American Medical Colleges, the chairman of a clinical science department with an M.D. degree averages about $193,000. Leder and Lippman, who made $50,000 and $80,000 respectively at NIH, now each make upwards of $200,000 in their university jobs.

Losing such top scientific talent might not be so bad if top scientific talent were as easy to come by as good lawyers and administrators. But that's not the case. Testifying before the Cutler commission, Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and director of the NIH's office of AIDS research, complained that "over the last decade, NIH has not been able to recruit a single senior scientist" from industry or academia to work in clinical or basic research programs.

As things stand now, NIH finds itself playing expensive games to attract those hard-to-get top scientists. Often the agency is forced to contract out for them. In these deals, NIH reimburses scientists' employers for their typically much higher salaries, and also pays for the frequently exorbitant overhead charged by their home institutions. This costs Uncle Sam much more than it would if he could hire these scientists directly at a realistic pay rate.

Many of NASA's top specialists also take off for private industry. Testifying before the Cutler commission, Dr. Noel Hinners, an associate deputy administrator at NASA, said the agency has for two years been trying unsuccessfully to recruit a director for a program in its space science and applications office. Because of this, NASA has been forced to rely on an exchange program with the private sector. The director they've brought in this way makes twice the salary NASA can offer.

Entry-level positions, too, are becoming more difficult to fill. The best science and engineering graduates are being lured by the booming biotechnology industry NIH fostered and by the aerospace industry NASA spawned. The highest entry-level professional salary NASA can offer—just under $24,000—falls significantly short of the salaries private companies can offer new graduates. In 1976, NASA got two out of every three job candidates it went after. Ten years later, that was down to one in three.

To make matters worse for a government with shallow pockets for science salaries, the American scientific labor pool is shrinking. The National Science Foundation has predicted a shortage of 20 percent to 30 percent for aeronautical engineers and computer

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specialists, and the Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts that future demand for aeronautical engineers will rise by 41 percent, for electrical engineers by 65 percent, and for computer specialists by 85 percent.

Revenge of the nerds

At the crux of this situation sits the National Institute of Standards and Technology (formerly the National Bureau of Standards). Charged with the evolving task of setting standards of measurement for new technologies, NIST is probably one of the major battlegrounds in what last year's presidential candidates liked to call "the fight to maintain this country's technological edge."

The scientific manpower shortage has hit NIST hard. For about a decade, the institute has struggled to attract and keep first-rate scientists. As at NASA, electrical engineering and computer science are two persistent problem areas. Since about 1980, NIST salaries for new Ph.D.s in these fields have lagged $5,000 to $10,000 behind private industry.

Because of the severity of this situation, NIST is being used as a model for how government could use salary incentives to improve performance. Last year Congress approved a five-year experiment that exempts the institute from a fixed government pay schedule, giving it some autonomous hiring and pay-raise authority. The project frees NIST from the lengthy employee clearance procedures and seniority pay system that most of government is wedded to. NIST recruiters can, without managerial approval, offer a potential employee up to the 75th percentile of the national salary range for many jobs. Once in, an employee receives raises based on performance rather than some seniority criterion. "The project's given us flexibility in setting pay and making offers," reports Dr. John Lyons, director of the National Engineering Laboratory, which conducts almost half of NIST's technical work. According to him, the experiment has considerably improved NIST's recruiting.

Where the project has not helped, though, is in efforts to keep people who have already reached the government pay ceiling for scientists (or in retaining members of the Senior Executive Service, who are not included in the experiment). It is at this point that industry and university salaries start to pull ahead of government salaries. Last December NIST lost a division chief whom Lyons called "the conceptual driving force" behind NIST's factory automation work—one of the institute's major projects. He went on to a university physics department as a full professor "for a package that included over $100,000 in salary, plus a lot of perks, and the ability to consult." Such non-salary benefits are a special attraction for government

The Worst City Government

Summer in Washington has a way of dividing the citizenry along class lines. People with money go to Kennebunkport. People without it go to the "rec."

Every year, more than 200,000 Washington residents patronize the city's 100 rec centers, and the District pays hundreds of playground supervisors and a 110-strong maintenance crew to keep those centers safe and in shape. But when I visited half a dozen local recs last month to check things out, safe and in shape is not what I found.

On a concrete island among parking lots in Southwest Washington's Greenleaf housing projects, there's a small, fenced-off playground with a sandbox at its center—filled not with sand but with dirt and broken glass. Garbage, glass, and empty liquor bottles litter the play area, and the only adults in sight are two middle-aged men offering sexual invitations to teenage passersby. This is the Martin Luther King-Greenleaf Recreation Center, which serves, and supposedly supervises, hundreds of kids every day.

Inside the center on a 95-degree afternoon, the stench of urine is overpowering. Broken bumper-pool and air-hockey tables are shoved in a corner, while a lone pool table appears to be the sole working aid to recreation. There is, however, a decorative touch on one wall: "Alcohol + Drugs = Aids = Death."

I found slightly newer playground equipment across the Anacostia River at Southeast's Congress Heights center, but like Greenleaf, the slides and swings sit in a field that shines with broken glass. On the day I visited, more than 50 children played outside, while inside the center was deserted save the director, who chatted on a phone in his office. "Isn't anyone supervising the kids outside?" I asked when he hung up. "I'm supervising them," he explained.

Even the center at Barry Farms, the mayor's pastorally inspired housing project in Northeast, turns out to be a weedy, isolated playground strewn with debris from the construction sites that surround it. While kids simply stay away, local drug dealers seem to find a far corner of the play area quite adequate.

Not that all the District's rec centers are dangerous, unsupervised, and filthy. I did manage to find one with a meticulously clean field, a swimming pool, and longer hours than all the others—a center complete with a grandmotherly playground monitor and pastel paper ducks and tulips in every window. This rec center, predictably, is in Georgetown.

—Katherine Boo

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scientists, because unlike congressmen or White House staff members, employees under federal civil service are subject to extremely severe limitations on, say, expense accounts and the use of government transportation.

Having the opportunity to do exciting work is an extra-monetary incentive to stay in a job. Getting to work on government planning and policy may provide challenges and satisfactions not found anywhere else. For jobs of that sort, salary raises are probably not that important. But such jobs should be carefully distinguished from two other sorts—those where the public and private sector variants are equally rewarding, and others where the work, while absolutely essential, is tedious and endlessly trying. It's with government employees in these latter categories that money can really matter.

> Losing top scientific talent might not be so bad if it were as easy to come by as lawyers and administrators.

Consider for example the Internal Revenue Service. Low wages and the high turnover and poor morale they cause have a lot to do with the widely reported IRS foul-ups. The accountants and other skilled personnel there do some of the government's most unpleasant, but important, work. When case examiners don't perform, both the government and private individuals suffer immensely. Who, for instance, has not read about the millions of tax documents the IRS loses annually, or about the error rate in the agency's telephone taxpayer assistance program? (GAO says it's 40 percent, IRS says 30 percent, but both agree it's too high.)

Tax examiners—the first workers in the IRS to check the millions of returns filed annually—receive a starting salary of $13,000 to $15,000. This for a job that requires familiarity with corporate and individual tax regulations and with the IRS's computerized master file system. The position is restricted to those with either a minimum of two years of college or equivalent office experience.

A College Placement Council survey conducted last year put the average starting salary for accounting graduates in the private sector at $24,120. In comparison, the federal government offered $19,008. Over 90 percent of the offers from private firms to accountants exceeded the government's average offers. A starting salary for an accountant at one of the Big Eight firms is around 35 percent higher than a federal starting salary.

Windbag bureaucrats

Can this wage disparity be unrelated to the results of a 1985 achievement test given to new hires at the IRS and to entry level accountants in large firms, in which over 80 percent of the private sector accountants scored higher than those at Internal Revenue? According to former IRS Commissioner Roscoe Egger, "It takes three years to develop a tax examiner," yet during his tenure, the IRS was keeping *less than 25 percent* of its people for three years. Last year, the turnover rate among workers assigned to the taxpayer services division had reached dizzying heights: 39 percent in New York and *100 percent* in Boston. Do you want to be audited by someone who doesn't know his job and won't stay to learn it? Do you want him auditing Michael Milken, with millions in government revenues at stake? The government is full of windbag bureaucrat jobs where we could drastically cut the salaries and the cause of good government would never miss a beat. But that doesn't apply to most IRS jobs.

Speaking before a House subcommittee in April, Robert M. Tobias, president of the National Treasury Employees Union, put his finger on one reason why IRS jobs should get special salary treatment: "The revenue-producing agencies of the federal government should be treated differently from other agencies. . .because they *are* different: they are revenue-producing and cuts simply lose revenue." Estimates about how much money the IRS collects for every dollar it spends vary wildly—from $8 to $220. But it's beyond dispute that the IRS is the federal government's largest single revenue raiser. Better salaries for those who process and audit returns would undoubtedly put a dent in the tax gap—the difference between taxes owed and taxes collected—which currently stands at $114 billion. Continuing to "save" on IRS salaries is costing us a bundle.

Doling out an across-the-board pay hike would cost us a bundle, too. Acme Widget would never double the salaries of its sales reps, of whom it has plenty, in order to solve the problem in its accounts receivable department. It's absurd that this is precisely the solution that the Cutler commission and other Washington oracles recommend. A government that can target rockets to the moon can surely target pay increases to the jobs that need them. No one's predicting a shortage of legislators, undersecretaries, or judges; instead, everyone's decrying the shortage of accountants, scientists, and others with technical know-how. We don't need another blue-ribbon commission to know where the smart money should go. □

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MEMO OF THE MONTH

Ohio Department of
Administrative Services
TELECOMMUNICATIONS MANAGEMENT
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COLUMBUS, OHIO 43266-0534

TO: TELECOMMUNICATIONS COORDINATORS

FROM: DAS TELECOMMUNICATIONS MANAGEMENT

SUBJECT: DISTINCTIVE RINGING ON COLUMBUS CENTREX TELEPHONES

DATE: MARCH 21, 1989

On April 1st, 1989, all telephones with Columbus Centrex lines(466,644,752) will have the distinctive ringing feature. There will be 3 distinctive ringing tones on Columbus Centrex(466,644,752) telephones.

The first type of ring will be for calls from outside Columbus Centrex lines to Columbus Centrex. This will be the normal ring, 2 seconds per ring, you here today on all calls.

The second type of ring will be for calls from Columbus Centrex to Columbus Centrex. This ring will be distinct by each ring being 1 and 1/2 seconds on and 1/2 second off. This sequence is repeated.

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This is a difficult feature to describe on paper, but you will learn the rings quickly through experience.

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A Pension for Trouble

The next S&L crisis

by Matthew Cooper

Now that most taxpayers have learned the extent of the S&L mess, they can be excused for wondering if there are any other financial time bombs waiting to go off. Yes, there are. Relatively speaking, the S&L crisis was a Hiroshima-sized atomic bomb. If you're bracing for a thermonuclear economic event, try public employee pensions.

These pension programs aren't just trouble for their ability to explode into future insolvency. In the meantime, they also draw precious funds away from other essential needs—health, education, defense. We can't cure AIDS, teach our children, or clean up the environment with pension checks. The $54 billion that the federal government will spend on retirement programs for its employees this year will be more than it spends on Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), and Food Stamps, and consumer safety, and AIDS research and treatment, and hazardous waste cleanup, and low income housing, and higher education *combined*.

But even more alarming is the extent to which public employee pensions will soak up future budgets. If you or I were providing for our own retirement we would regularly set aside sums that would grow, through prudent investment, into enough to cover our needs once we stopped working. It should be the same with public retirement plans, but it isn't.

In the financial vernacular, foreseeable expenses required by our eventual retirement, but which we can pay for with the money we have put away now, are our funded liabilities. Any difference between what we have put away and what we know we are going to need is an unfunded liability. In general, with public pensions—at the federal, state, and local level—neither the retirees nor the governments has been owning up to predictable retirement needs.

The unfunded liabilities of the federal government's major retirement programs—taking into account employees already retired and those likely to—are stunning. They're much higher than the $100 billion to $250 billion figure usually ascribed to the S&L bailout. They total more than $481 billion for the Civil Service Retirement System alone. Combined with

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other programs for retired federal workers, including military and railroad retirees, *the unfunded liability now tops $1 trillion.*

And that's just the problem at the federal level. Across the country, there are more than 6,000 pension plans covering state, county, and local government employees—the majority of which carry unfunded liabilities. Since these plans are run according to different formulas, there's no single figure to measure their total unfunded liability. There's evidence that the situation has improved since the seventies when Hamtramck, Michigan went bankrupt over pension debts—and when pension debts helped push New York City to the brink of financial collapse. But there are still serious grounds for doubt about the fiscal health of state and local public pension funds. After all, if some seven million active-duty and retired federal employees can produce an unfunded pension liability of $1 trillion, think of the possibilities for their *13 million* counterparts at the state and local level. Estimates for the subfederal unfunded pension liability vary widely—$160 billion on the low side, $450 billion on the high side. Either way the situation inspires fear. The unfunded liability is, for example, $18 billion in Massachusetts and $10 billion each in Florida and Louisiana.

As so often is the case with fiscal crises, specialists catch the whiff of disaster before the general public does. Speaking of the federal situation, Dan McGill, chairman of the Pension Research Council at the Wharton School of Business, says, "They're in terrible shape." "Really horrible," adds Rita Horwitz, executive director of the Texas State Pension Review Board.

To be sure, these huge unfunded liabilities can be spread out over 20-, 30-, or even 40-year spans. But that doesn't mean we're not paying for them. Governments with unfunded liabilities face the Hobson's Choice of either paying more towards their pension liabilities now or continuing to carry them forward unfunded. If they do the former, they cut other essential services. If the latter, the unfunded liabilities threaten to balloon even larger. In 1984 the Grace Commission on cost control found that to amortize the liability of the Civil Service Retirement System over 40 years would require spending an additional amount every year equal to just under 85 percent of the then-current payroll costs—that is, it would require annually spending almost as much on retirees as on those currently working.

Across the country, pension expenses are hobbling government budgets. The International City Management Association has found that since 1983, per capita expenditures for U.S. retirement programs for police, fire, and refuse departments rose 47.4 percent, 35.3 percent, and 49.7 percent respectively. (By contrast, salaries for those departments rose approximately half that fast.) By 1992, it's estimated that Los Angeles will be paying as much to its retirees as it does to its active employees. In Washington D.C, as Charles Peters recently reported in "Tilting at Windmills" [June], an internal police department report found that 2,351 cops on the 3,880-member force—that's 61 percent—are scheduled to retire by 1992, thereby taking a slice out of that year's budget of at least $29 million.

> The all-time champion federal retiree is probably Mike Mansfield, the former Senate majority leader and ambassador to Japan. His annual pension is $136,000.

Last fall in Massachusetts, there was a flap when Governor Michael Dukakis tried to use $17 million from the state teachers' retirement fund to cover a shortfall in the annual budget. That Dukakis wanted to raid the fund typifies government's tendency to play fast and loose with its pension debts. That this plan prompted as much outrage as it did shows how little is understood about the magnitude of these debts: this $17 million is nothing compared to the $18 billion in unfunded pension liabilities Massachusetts is saddled with.

Compare all this bad news about public pension costs to the goings-on with private pensions—although they are hardly worry-free, only 20 percent of them even have unfunded liabilities.

The real Wright scandal

The notion of decent pensions for retired government and military employees is noble and pragmatic. They were designed to compensate for what were originally rather low salaries, as well as for the dangers faced by soldiers. But government pension costs kept going out of sight even when the salaries got better and whether or not real dangers were faced. How

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did the simple and fair idea of a government pension get so monumentally fouled up?

Here's how. Public pension benefits are generous in the extreme. The average private pensioner can expect to earn approximately $200,000 during his or her retirement; the average federal civil servant, $718,000.

> The average age of a retiring military officer is 43—younger than Rolling Stone guitarist Keith Richards.

The real Jim Wright scandal may not have been his shady book or oil well deals but his perfectly legal pension deal. His congressional pension will be calculated at 80 percent of his final three years' salary, including the $115,000 per year he earned as Speaker. (Wright earned more than the standard congressional salary of $89,500 because being Speaker carries with it a salary bonus.) Wright's annual pension will start at $83,070, according to the National Taxpayers Union. His total lifetime benefits will likely be nearly $2 million. Had the congressional pay raise been approved, Wright's annual pension would have been around $140,000, and his total benefits would have been $3 million.

The rest of The Speakers Bureau isn't faring too badly either. Tip O'Neill receives an annual pension of $65,000. His predecessor, Carl Albert, takes down around $100,000. (It should be mentioned that Albert is one of the few politicians who has endorsed calls for pension reform.) Retired Senator J. William Fulbright receives a pension of about $75,000, while small-government conservative Barry Goldwater gets about $83,000. Perhaps the all-time champion federal retiree is Mike Mansfield, the former Senate Majority Leader and ambassador to Japan. He annually receives more than $136,000.

The National Taxpayers Union found that 163 of the 346 retired congressmen currently getting benefits can expect to collect more than $1 million. And more than one-third of these congressional retirees receive more in annual pension payments than they earned in Congress.

State and local politicians also frequently hit this sort of pension paydirt. Barred by state law from seeking reelection, two-term Georgia Governor George Busbee retired from the statehouse in 1983 at age 55 and qualified at once for a $43,000-a-year pension under a rule providing immediate pensions to state employees whose jobs are abolished or who have been fired. Former California Governor Pat Brown, who left office 23 years ago, collects an annual pension that exceeds the current governor's salary of $85,000.

Obviously, not all civil servants retire on this kind of money. There's Hilda Weldon, for instance. Her "29 years, 3 months, and 17 days" in the civil service took her from wartime service at the Naval Supply Center in her hometown of Norfolk, Virginia, to accounting work at the Government Printing Office. Retiring in Washington after attaining the lower/middle civil service job grade of GS-9, Weldon receives less than $15,000 a year in pension benefits. "When they say that senior citizens are rich, they're not talking about the same people I know," Weldon says.

But it's not just congressional fat cats who do so much better than Weldon. Many civil service retirees do. Concern about the federal civil service pension payout is not focused on the tens of thousands of top-level GS workers or the 7,000 Senior Executive Service people above them. It's about the much larger number of mid-level civil servants who retire rather lucratively. According to estimates offered by the Office of Personnel Management, the average civilian federal retiree gets out at grade GS-11. (Currently there are 189,000 federal workers in that grade.) The typical monthly benefit for a GS-11 retiring after 30 years' service is approximately $1,500 a month. Weigh that against the monthly $516 the average Social Security retiree gets—it's nearly three times as much.

Boon over Miami

And consider what actuaries call the "replacement ratio"—how much of your best active salary you get back annually in retirement. A respected actuarial firm, The Wyatt Company, found that at the top 50 businesses in the *Fortune* 500, employees retiring at age 55 after 30 years' service average a replacement ratio of 29.5 percent. By contrast, recent surveys show that for civil service retirees in the same category, the replacement ratio averages 53 percent—nearly twice as high.

Boom states have certainly thrown their pension dollars around. Phillip Longman, a journalist specializing in old-age entitlements, has described how Florida's phenomenal growth was matched by its public pension irresponsibility. When the state

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public retirement plan was established 19 years ago, a state employee at age 65 with 45 years' experience became entitled to a pension equal to one half of his or her salary. Today however, a typical state worker with just 30 years' experience receives a pension, which, when combined with Social Security, replaces 78 percent of the average of his or her five peak salary years. Under pressure from public employee unions, Florida has continued to raise pensions—recently, police and fire pension benefits were jacked up by 50 percent.

But, amazingly, poor states are just as profligate. In West Virginia, teachers can retire after 30 years' service and receive 60 percent of the average of their best five years' salary.

And it's not just that public pensions are an incredibly good deal; they're an incredibly good deal you often can latch onto at an absurdly young age. Access to government pensions is just too easy—out of whack with ordinary notions of "retirement." Normally, full civil service pensions kick in after only 30 working years—which usually means at about age 55. According to OPM, in 1987 (the most recent year for which figures are available) there were 343,288 retired civil servants in their fifties receiving full benefits. Should we really be supporting the equivalent of a city the size of Miami full of retirees in their fifties? In most private plans, walk away in your fifties and you suffer a significant financial penalty.

With military pensions, this problem is even worse. They take effect after just 20 years. Since many service members enlist immediately after high school, this means that uniformed retirees can start getting full benefits at age 37 or 38. In fact, one-fourth of all military personnel retire in their thirties. The average age of a retiring officer is 43—younger than Rolling Stone guitarist Keith Richards. Early retirement is the main reason a veteran can expect to receive six times more pension income over his lifetime than a private pensioner.

These excessively early retirements create longer and hence larger payouts to retirees and make it possible for them to layer pension on top of pension in the still-legal variants of "double dipping." No wonder the Grace Commission concluded that "there is probably no other retirement system which is as liberal and costly as the U.S. Military Retirement System." No wonder the unfunded liabilities of the Military Retirement System are $449 billion.

Fattening COLAs

Despite such debts, there's a nationwide trend toward earlier access to public pension benefits. In 1984 seven states lowered their retirement ages. The military pen-

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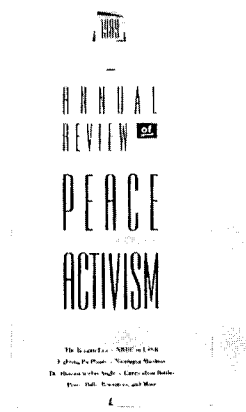

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sion plan's 20-year benefit gate has become standard fare in many police and fire departments, according to the Police Executive Research Forum. With New York State's pension system, firefighters can start their golden years after 20 years' service—with no minimum age requirement. In Columbus, Georgia, cops can start collecting benefits after just 10 years.

> By retiring at age 45, former congressman Dan Mica can probably count on a $2.5 million government pension.

Lest you think it's just GIs and cops who dip so early into the public coffers, consider the case of Dan Mica, a former congressman from Florida, whose pension lust was first reported in *Roll Call*, the Capitol Hill newspaper, and later elaborated on in *The Washington Times*. Mica, who in January left the House after 19 years, returned almost immediately to his old stomping grounds to serve as a consultant on the payroll of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. Why the sudden homecoming? Did he miss the aroma of the Senate's famous bean soup? No, he's back because he needs one more year of service to make the Magic 20—and thus rake in a $36,054 congressional pension. Mica is just 45. Had Mica retired at 60 he would have received an average of $40,826 a year for a likely total of $1,653,657. But by retiring at 45, he stands to haul in $897,560 more. In short, no matter how many more careers Mica pursues, if his life is of average length, he can count on at least a *$2.5 million* government pension.

Despite such generous payouts, public pension plans often require only negligible financial contributions by those covered. The amount of total benefits paid in by civil service retirees is about 7 percent of their salary; for the military, it is *zero* percent. Of the $54 billion the federal government will spend on retirement next year, only $8.3 billion will have come from the employees themselves.

Public pensions are also subject to cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs), which, although well-intentioned, have driven up costs out of all proportion to any good they produce. COLAs have gone wrong for two main reasons:

One, they are not applied year after year to a base pension figure but instead are compounded year after year—piling COLAs on top of COLAs. In just 10 years at 4 percent inflation a $20,000 pension costs the government $33,000 more through compounding the COLA than it would if the adjustment were applied only to the base amount. Compounding COLAs the government way frequently makes COLAs *outpace* inflation. (And there are other ways COLAs can do that—between 1969 and 1976, civil service retirees received a COLA-*plus-1-percent* increase in their pension.)

Two, they are applied to every government pensioner's take no matter how lavish, instead of being focused on those meager pensions truly requiring anti-inflation protection. COLAs have fattened payments for many who were already doing just fine. Why should federal retirees be inflation-proofed when so many others in great need—blue collar wage-earners in high-cost cities, those on AFDC, low-income families with serious health problems, etc.—are not? COLAs have contributed immensely to the overall expense of public pension funds. The Congressional Research Service estimates that they now account for 47 percent of all federal pension payouts. This uncritical use of COLAs has meant that some 400,000 federal retirees make more now than they did when they were working.

Power vs. perspective

Politics makes the pension problem worse. Legislators are easily tempted to dole out benefits to an important constituent group when the debts they thereby create are so distant, and more importantly, so *invisible* that no counter-wave of public indignation ever materializes.

Retired federal employees form a huge bloc. There are five states—California, Texas, Florida, New York, and Virginia—in which there are more than 100,000 federal pensioners and beneficiaries. Taking into account both civil service and military pensioners, there are 2.3 million retired federal employees.

And that constituency is well organized. Recently, the National Association for Retired Federal Employees helped shoot down a Bush administration proposal to pare back COLA provisions. Boasting over 490,000 members, NARFE was the fifth largest contributor (of the nation's 4,263 PACs) to federal campaigns during the last election cycle, putting it just behind mega-political lobbiers like the National

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Association of Realtors and the American Medical Association.

Organized power of this magnitude hurts pension reform because it makes it much harder for politicians to discriminate between, say, the very real needs of widows retiring from the bottom rungs of government salary scales on the one hand, and on the other, 40-year-old ex-army officers who will collect a second full salary for the next 30 years.

As bad as this all seems, the pension morass isn't hopeless. Some reforms have been started. In 1986, Congress created a more restrained plan for new civil servants, which gave them the option to make higher contributions towards their own pensions and rewarded them with generous matching funds and tax benefits for doing so. Under this arrangement employee contributions have gone up. But it still allows the civil servants it covers to stay with an old-style pension if they choose. And although this fact has already saddled the new system with a $5 billion unfunded liability, the 1986 change is still a small step in the right direction. So is the recent change in military pensions that makes it less remunerative to get out after 20 years than it used to be.

But we can do more.

We could improve things if we insisted on eliminating the guilty factors: no more political escapism. We have to admit that fat sums of the Mike Mansfield variety are a waste and a perversion of the basic idea of a pension. No more free rides—pensioners should be required to make meaningful contributions to their own futures. And no more across-the-board or compounded COLAs—save that kind of protection for those who really need it.

And most important of all, no more handsome retirement benefits after less than half the average working life. Obviously, there's hardship and danger in some military jobs, but most work in uniform is a far cry from Chuck Yeager. The GAO has found that 93 percent of all military jobs are not combat-related and that 31 percent of all armed service members have never seen combat-related duty. And even for the handful who have spent 20 years in combat-related specialties, the answer is to assign them lighter duty as they get older—not allowing them to retire while they're thirty-something. There is even less reason for civilians to walk away from their government work 10 years earlier than the normal civilian retirement age.

And what's so good about early retirement anyway? Almost everything we know indicates that meaningful work is *good* for you. That so many 40- and 50-year-old military and civilian retirees with big pensions still throw themselves into second careers that they enjoy ought to tell you that they want to work. Why not have them continue to work in the area they know best and where they contribute the most to the country? At the very least, military personnel should be required to work through their forties, and civilians at least through their fifties. Only then should we pay them to retire.

Cost of luxury

One of the few places where you'll get a perspective on pensions sharply contrasting with that of lobbies like NARFE is on Connecticut Avenue in Washington, a boulevard lined with elegant law firms and elegant lobbying firms, but with some older, less upscale office buildings sprinkled in. There, in one of the nondescript walk-ups, you'll find the rundown offices of Hastings Keith. Since 1981, the 74-year-old ex-congressman has been trying to stir up public concern about public employee pensions through his own man-the-barricades lobby, the National Committee on Public Employee Pension Systems. Keith's own exorbitant benefits dramatically exemplify the excesses of public pensions.

Keith began his career as a fed with military service before, during, and after World War II. In 1958 he was elected from the congressional district that encompasses Cape Cod and in 1972 he left to work in the Nixon administration. After a few months of that, Keith retired. He was only 58.

Because of cost-of-living increases—"cost of luxury increases," Keith dubs them—his retirement, just from civil service, is up to more than $50,000 a year. But as they say on the TV game shows: "Wait! That's not all!" Each year he collects more than $13,000 in military benefits and another $11,000 from Social Security. His annual take: $78,500. All told, Keith has received more than $800,000 from the federal government in the past 17 years without working a day.

Even though Keith's story has gotten media coverage, up against lobbying powerhouses like NARFE, his calls for reform have failed to make a significant dent in the national news. And local pension crises seem to have come to the fore in only a few cities and states. *They* know who they are, because their troubles have been big local stories, but these fiscal disasters and the others like them waiting to unfold have not yet grabbed national attention.

Maybe that's the biggest part of the pension story—it's been kept so quiet. Neither the U.S. Conference of Mayors, nor the League of Cities, nor the National Association of Counties, nor the National Association of State Budget Officers currently has any materials prepared on the subject. This prompts a worrisome thought: At this point, like S&L officials before them, maybe the politicians on the line for the pension problem are simply hoping it won't draw notice until it's so gargantuan that drastic help will have to be provided from outside, which means from taxpayers, of course. □

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A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Legislature

I lost.

by David McCraw

I am standing outside a firehouse on a rural road in the town of Esopus, New York. Inside, five or six people are voting. Two of them have come with me. I know they are just two votes out of more than 4,500 that will be cast today, but I do not really believe it. In my mind, they have become *the* two votes, the only two votes that matter.

I have never run for anything in my life, and now, in its final hours, my campaign has come down to a desperate attempt to get those last two voters to the polls.

For nearly five months I have been campaigning for a seat in the Ulster County Legislature, one of three Democrats running against the three Republican incumbents in the towns of Esopus and Rosendale. Over the past 60 days, I have devoted about 200 hours of my life to knocking on doors, attending church dinners, addressing envelopes, putting up yard signs graced with my name, and hitting up just about everyone I know—and lots of people I don't—for a few bucks to keep my campaign going. Almost every night and every Saturday and Sunday, I have been out knocking on doors, more than 2,000 in all. I've become obsessive and compulsive: driving home from work, when I've felt the urge come over me, I've pulled over my car, put on my name badge, and begun working a neighborhood.

Getting my two voters to the polls has not been easy. They are strangers to me, names on a list of people I have been calling in a last-ditch effort to get out the vote before the polls close at 9 p.m. Yes, the woman has told me on the phone, she wants to vote, and her son, too, but they have no ride to the polls. "And we always vote," she says. Ten minutes later, mother and son are in the back of my Honda Civic, chatting about Brooklyn and septic tanks and life in the country.

As we cruise along in the dark, I fantasize that in a just universe, these two voters will put me over the top. Their votes would be the payoff for the extra effort. For it to work out any other way would be cosmic cruelty.

In my newfound life in local politics I have become, like the other candidates, a luck freak. There are no polls. There are no experts. In a local race like this one,

David McCraw is director of journalism at Marist College. *Copyright 1988 Suburban Publishing Inc. Reprinted with permission of* Hudson Valley *magazine.*

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the campaign trail has no markings. Yet we desperately want to know how we are doing, looking for some confirmation of vague feelings and half-baked hunches. We have become rumormongers and tea-leaf readers, believers in signs, bouncing back and forth between uneasy optimism and unfettered paranoia. I have won four raffles at the dinners and fairs and yard sales that are mandatory stops on the campaign trail. People tell me it is a good sign, a very good sign. I shrug off such talk, but I notice that as Election Day draws nearer, I tell people about the raffles more and more often.

Now I am convinced that I am going to be one of the three winners in the legislative race. I just have a certain feeling. Bea Havranek, the town supervisor in Rosendale, has said it looks good for us. "How can she tell?" somebody asks. Nobody knows. Nobody cares. We trust Bea. We *want* to believe it. We let the subject drop.

All day, I have felt on the brink of victory. I've seen it in the way people have nodded at me as they come out of the polling places, and I remember all the rumors I have heard over the past three days of die-hard Republicans ("black Republicans" we call them) who are abandoning their party and voting for me. And Tommy Killeen, proprietor of Port Ewen Liquors, where the collective political wisdom of Esopus is distilled and dispensed, says it looks good. I believe him, too.

My bliss in believing that these two last voters I'm bringing to the polls will deliver my soon-to-be-good political fortune is jarred by the presence of a freight train making a complete stop in front of me, blocking Union Center Road. In effect the train is cutting the election district in half: my two votes and me on one side, the polling place on the other. For a few minutes we wait. The train does not move. I think again of cosmic cruelty. Finally, I pull a sloppy U-turn and head back to Route 9W, drive south a couple of miles and try a second crossing. The train is blocking that one, too. It appears to be quite long and quite dead. In less than an hour, the polls will be closed.

The only route that remains lies even farther south and involves going over the top of Esopus Mountain on a road that is, in places, barely wide enough for a car. But it's that or cart my two omens back home. Take it or leave it. Twenty minutes and one wrong turn later, I pull into the polling place. Mother and son both thank me for my efforts. I wait in the parking lot. "Good luck," a young woman says as she leaves. Another good sign, I think.

For the first time in hours, I am alone. In a few minutes the whole campaign will be over. Campaigning has overtaken my life these past eight weeks. In Ulster County politics, it's a time-honored tradition to campaign door-to-door, but none of us really knows whether it does any good. We do it, in part, because it makes us feel as if we are making progress. Each night we go home and get out our election district maps and color in the streets we have done that day. It's the one tangible thing we have in our luck-freak world, and we choose to swear by it.

At the end of the day tomorrow, I will go and do what other people do. I tell friends that I'm looking forward to that, but I know that I will miss the clarity of purpose that a campaign imposes on a life. All addictions have their own peculiar logic.

From the side door of the firehouse, my two lucky charms emerge, thanking me again. It is a pleasant ride back to their house. I have invested the better part of an hour for these two votes. As we pull into the driveway, the woman asks: "Are you David McCraw?" I have mentioned my name at least three times. I mention it again. There is an awkward silence from the back seat. The woman says she has voted for me. I'm not so certain. The son is noticeably quiet. Yes, I think as they walk toward the door, maybe the gods can be that cruel.

Tuesday, May 26, 10:15 a.m.

You'd like to think it happens the way it does for Jesse Jackson, with a throng of supporters screaming, "Run, Jesse, Run!" For me, it was one Roger Mabie on the phone saying, "David, I have a rather strange request."

I have met Roger only twice in my life. He is the head of the Esopus town Democrats and, at 70, the closest thing the town has to an elder statesman: a hometown boy who went to Harvard, former town supervisor, former county legislator. Two weeks ago, we were seated together at a fundraiser for Assemblyman Maurice Hinchey. Now Mabie is calling to ask me to run for the Ulster County Legislature.

I do not ask him the obvious question—why is he calling me? I am too flattered, too vain, too curious. Instead I ask him some technical questions about running for office, and then tell him I'll think about it.

"It will be a slice of American life," he assures me.

Tuesday, June 2, 7:15 p.m.

I am speeding down the back roads of Rosendale, trying to get to Ulster County Community College. Neil Young is on the radio, singing a song about what it would be like if Miss Liberty were a little girl. The late-day sun is still shining.

In a few minutes, at the Democrats' county convention, I will be nominated as one of the three legislative candidates from District 6. Marilyn Coffey, the Esopus supervisor, has agreed to run also. Our third running mate is a nurse named Manna Jo Greene.

I have dressed for my part—the standard issue khaki suit, the blue Oxford, the requisite red tie—but the last thing I feel like is a politician. For six years, I have been the Sunday humor columnist for the *Daily Freeman*, a freelance writer, and a journalism professor

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> I've become obsessive: driving home from work, I've pulled over my car, put on my name badge, and begun working a neighborhood.

at Marist College in Poughkeepsie. I have never held public office, never been to a caucus or convention, never worked on a political campaign.

Until eight days ago, I had never thought about running for office, except in that off-handed way that journalists do when they cover politics, knowing full well that blessedly it will never come to pass. So newborn is my political identity that a week ago I received an invitation to a fund-raising luau for Republican Roscoe Pecora, one of the incumbent Republican legislators I will be nominated to run against tonight.

Why am I running? The question makes me uncomfortable. Because I was asked. Because I am curious to find out what it's like. Because I think I'd be a pretty good legislator, although I'm not all that clear on what legislators do.

Three days after Roger called, I called back and accepted. By then I had talked it over with a few friends and arranged for a leave of absence from the *Freeman*. "If I were Frank Cashen [general manager of the Mets], I'd call you a foundation player," Roger says on the phone. He is decidedly more confident about this than I am.

In the legislature, the Republicans hold a whopping 25 to 8 majority. Tonight's gathering is not likely to conjure up many visions of a better tomorrow for the Democrats. Maybe 100 people fill a quarter of the auditorium. There are no balloons, no banners, no brass bands playing "Happy Days Are Here Again." Seven or eight reporters slouch down in a row of seats near the front.

One by one, the candidates come forward to say a few words. A couple admit they were drafted that very afternoon. One concludes his remarks with a loud promise to help make "Bob Dwyer the majority leader in the legislature." *John* Dwyer, the Democrat's legislative leader, smiles forgivingly.

All the candidates, including myself, float the standard rhetoric about tossing the Republicans out of office and sweeping to victory in November. The Democratic insiders think there's reason to be hopeful in my district. Until two years ago, two of the district's three seats were held by Democrats, and the current legislature has received some bruisingly bad publicity for cost overruns on the renovation of the county office building in Kingston. Add to that Marilyn's high profile as town supervisor and my purported name recognition as a columnist, and you have the rosy, upside scenario.

But the numbers are against us. Of the 7,000 voters in our largely rural district, only 1,700 are registered Democrats, with the rest fairly evenly divided between Republicans and independents. One of the three incumbents, Attilio Contini, a darling of the hard right, has managed to hold his seat for 10 years. His junior colleague, Roscoe Pecora, has already raised nearly $2,000, with more to come, in a race that most people price in the $500 to $1,000 range. The third Republican, Joan Every, whose first term in office might charitably be described as nondescript, is seen as the most vulnerable, but even she rolled up an impressive 2,200 votes in the 1985 sweep.

And then there are my personal statistics: no money raised, no political experience, a brief two years of residency in Esopus, and maybe six real friends living in the district (three of whom, I later discovered, aren't registered voters).

In my impromptu speech I don't mention the negative numbers. Instead I play on my image as a columnist with a low tolerance for politics and politicians. "I am not a politician. I am a person who cares deeply about Ulster County," I say. The warm response is encouraging. I leave feeling upbeat.

But when I think beyond the partisan crowd in the auditorium, there are some nagging personal doubts. For one thing, I have no idea what running for office entails. For another, the response to the announcement of my candidacy has been something less than overwhelming. A former colleague at the *Freeman* wrote about me in his political column: "Legislative candidates are a dime a dozen. A good writer can give joy for a lifetime." Another friend said I should run because I have "one of those Jimmy Carter smiles." My ex-wife has weighed in succinctly: "Oh, God."

Thursday, October 22, 4:30 p.m.

The sky is real blue, and it's the best day yet for watching the leaves turn color in Ulster County. I am making my way down Hardenburgh Road with Marilyn Coffey and Anne Hiller, the town court clerk. We've gone part of the way on foot, but as the houses start to spread out we resort to using Anne's car. After seven weeks of this, we have fallen into easy camaraderie.

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

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In a local race such as mine, door-to-door, grass-roots campaigning is the most common modus operandi. Media coverage is minimal, and only four meet-the-candidate nights are on the schedule. Few people, except for family and friends, will show up for any of them. A fat issues notebook I've compiled rarely gets opened. The advertising medium of preference here is the yard sign, and there we already have had to concede defeat. Our opponents' signs are everywhere, hanging from stakes and trees and old barns.

I have learned to be careful when someone mentions shingles. Home improvement or disease? It could go either way.

As we go door to door, very rarely is there any real politicking. We introduce ourselves, we hand out our literature, and then we move to the next house to do it all over again. People are polite, albeit noncommittal. Only one door has been slammed in our faces. At another stop, a woman let us know that "only the Democrats would dare interrupt her in the middle of a TV show."

On weekends, homeowners are more hostile. I feel like an intruder as I go knocking on doors. We've taken to announcing right up front, "We're not Jehovah's Witnesses." It helps.

What doorstep conversations we do have generally fall into three categories: home improvements, cooking, and disease. I have learned to be careful when someone mentions shingles. Home improvement or disease? It could go either way.

I am threatening to write a country-and-western song about campaigning door-to-door, but I can't figure out how to rhyme "aluminum siding" and "gall bladder." We are getting giddy. The exhaustion, if not the absurdity, of campaigning is catching up with us.

As part of my coattails strategy for getting elected, I nearly always campaign with veteran politicians. In Rosendale, I work with Bea Havranek; in Esopus, with Anne Hiller or Marilyn Coffey or Roger Mabie. Over time, we learn one another's style and rhythm, and we adjust accordingly. With Anne and Marilyn, I know we will be moving at a healthy clip. With Roger or Bea, the pace will be slower. With Roger, I know I have to think twice about my apparel. We have been known to show up dressed in Ivy League identical: blue blazer, blue striped Oxford, and a crew-neck sweater. To an unsuspecting electorate, we look like renegade recruiters from a failing New England prep school.

Among the veterans, an entire body of folklore about door-to-door campaigning has evolved. There are stories of candidates falling through porches, and being chased by gun-toting constituents. Once, so the story goes, a woman came to the door, the candidate discovering too late that he had rung the doorbell of a couple who had been making love on the living room floor.

Nothing so exciting is happening to me on my campaign trail. But I've been in a living room with a Dwight Gooden shrine on the wall and have been given a tour of a house built largely from junk found at the Rosendale landfill. One woman told me her neighbors had planted electrodes in her brain. One older and somewhat demented woman came to the door in her underwear. Pretty tame stuff, really.

On this Thursday, we are having a particularly good afternoon, lots of people home, and even a few commitments. We resist the urge to feel confident, but it comes over us anyway. Marilyn and I have been endorsed by the powerful Civil Service Employees Association. And a fundraiser my friend Sandy put together for me last weekend at her house was an unabashed success. We set out to bring in $900 and ended up with more than $1,700. Tomorrow Marilyn and I will be among three candidates endorsed by WGHQ-AM in Kingston. Everything is going our way.

Thursday, October 29, 4:45 p.m.

The rain and sleet come down as we ride along Route 9W, jumping off and on the back of Anne's Subaru station wagon, going door to door on the final Thursday of the campaign. I am wet and cold and miserable, I want to go home. I want the election to be over.

I think about yesterday's candidates' night, our last joint appearance with our opponents. I talked, as always, about fighting overdevelopment, but this time I had the passion, clarity, the right touch of humor in my voice. I connected with the audience like no one else. "You should be thinking about running for the Assembly," someone said afterwards. Others offer similar praise. I left on the best high of the campaign.

Now, 18 hours later in the rain on Route 9W, I hit bottom. I'm tired. For five hours last night, Sandy and I folded letters and stuffed envelopes. At 3:30 in the morning, I was dropping off a grocery bag of mail at the Kingston post office. Now, the weather turns worse. My shoes and socks are soaked. I have no overcoat. Yet we go to one more house.

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Election night, 9 p.m.

The poll watchers at Esopus Town Hall in Port Ewen cheer. They have been here since 5:30 a.m. The polls are now closed. The election inspectors open up the backs of the machines—three of the town's seven districts vote here—and pull out five carbon sheets that record the votes.

The Democrats have set up in the town clerk's office next door to the polling area. Roger Mabie, once again a candidate for supervisor, has put himself in charge of our unofficial tally. Marilyn is out at the rural polling sites. Manna Jo Greene is with the Democrats in Rosendale. I am here, pacing.

Today has been disorienting. All around me normal life has continued in fashion, but I have felt like a groom on his wedding day: a public curiosity, itchy, idle, a man carried along by events no longer under his control.

I also feel full. We have eaten our way through Election Day. All the Esopus candidates, Republicans and Democrats, gathered in the morning at Lindy's luncheonette for a free breakfast. Lunch was an extended chow-down of chicken, steak, and wine at Kingston's Twaalfskill Club, and dinner was stew at Marilyn's house.

In between, we cruised the district, visiting polling places, passing some time with Tommy Killeen at the liquor store, hanging around town hall waiting for calls from voters who needed rides.

Over the past 10 days, I pressed my campaign well beyond anything I intended. I sent personal notes to more than 150 people I met during the campaign. I aired 20 radio spots. I did a hand-addressed, first-class mailing to nearly 1,000 voters, writing individual messages on at least 700 of them. I spent more than $600 on newspaper advertising. And even as late as last night I was knocking on strangers' doors and calling people at home. When all the bills are in, I will have spent $2,500, nearly five times what I had planned, $800 of my own, $1,700 raised.

And now this is it: 15 people in a small room waiting for some numbers to be recorded. I feel neither hopeful nor pessimistic, just numb. We are no longer luck freaks and omen readers. We have become accountants.

I walk over and join the cluster of people around Roger. The first district—Esopus 1, a swing district—is being counted. Coffey. . .180. . .McCraw. . .150. . . Greene. . .143. . .Contini. . .207. . .Pecora. . .263. . . Every. . .194. I walk back to where Sandy is sitting. It's going to be a long night, I tell her.

Election night, 9:45 p.m.

At least I am no longer the prisoner of uncertainty. I am also no longer the prisoner of hope. Every few minutes, more bad news dribbles in from the polls, and for a while our loyalists gamely float encouraging words. "Wait and see what happens to District 3," someone suggests after we take a beating in 1 and 2. But within five minutes I learn that in District 3, I am running a distant fifth. "Maybe Rosendale will come through for you," I hear a few minutes later. The phone call comes from Bea Havranek. I am running fifth there, too.

Tommy Killeen starts talking about what I should run for next year—the campaign has officially ended. I pour some champagne and walk back to Marilyn's office to take the final results from Rosendale over the phone. She has finished third in Esopus. She runs last in Rosendale. The Republicans have swept. "Tomorrow will be bad," she says, "but by Thursday no one will remember."

Out front, the few people who remain are trying to have a party and failing miserably. Roger has won; so has Anne. But the Republicans have taken both the town board and the county legislative seats.

"You of all people should know how to be philosophical about this," a friend says. I can't decide whether she's just trying to lift my spirits or is afraid I'll go outside and punch out a telephone booth. "Of course," I say.

Election night, 11 p.m.

Marilyn and I ride in my car in silence. We are going to Republican headquarters in Rosendale to congratulate the victors. We have no theories about what happened. We just lost. Tomorrow, we and everyone we know will be doing a post mortem.

We walk into the Republicans' storefront office. Inside we find a crowd, largely made up of Democrats, town candidates who also came over to concede. The Republican candidates are nowhere to be found. Nobody knows what we're supposed to do. We stand around for a while, and then we leave. An absurd twist on a bizarre night.

I drive back home via Port Ewen. On the way out of town, I pass our billboard, the one that has "Coffey, Greene, McCraw" in big red letters across the top. Below that, it says: "Vote for answers, not excuses." It occurs to me that the sign is going to look fairly silly in the morning.

I think back to June, when somebody asked me why I wanted to run, and I said, "I think it's one of those things everybody in America should do once." I guess I still believe that. In local politics, you see America from the ground up. You see the pettiness and the prejudice and the narrow vision, but mainly you come away amazed by the marvelous diversity of life out there. There is also affirmation that people are basically decent, good, and caring. I'm glad I had a chance to discover that.

But damn, it sure would have been nice to win.□

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Mr. Smith Goes to Augusta

A young journalist gets a first-hand political education. Here's what he learned.

by John Diamond

Not too long ago I received a terse letter from someone who was clearly upset with my endorsement of a proposed health care facility to be located just outside my legislative district in Bangor, Maine.

The writer, whose name I recognized from my weekly mailing list, berated me for being "ignorant on the issue" and "a captive of the hospital industry." Furthermore, he suggested my service in government had been a betrayal of the public trust. In closing, the letter summed up my eight-year legislative career by stating that I had done "nothing whatsoever for the people of Maine."

But in spite of his hostility toward me and my politics, the writer left me with one final message indicative of the neighbor-like relationship we Maine politicians tend to have with our constituents: "P.S. My parents send their regards."

I grew up interested in journalism and politics, starting out as a reporter before making an eight-year foray into state politics. Having learned a lot about how legislators think and operate, I've headed back to the other side of the notebook.

Trading places for such a lengthy period has given me a different perspective on both journalism and public service. When I was first sent to cover the Maine legislature for Maine Public Broadcasting in 1977, I was only 22 years old and just finishing a B.A. in journalism—relatively naive, with no previous exposure to the political system. I went believing that policy-making was simply fair-minded men and women contemplating what would be in the public's best interest. Whichever side got the most votes on an issue won; it seemed so simple.

I knew nothing then about the influence of lobbyists, constituents, party leaders, and purse strings. Nobody ever sat me down to tell me the political facts of life—that politics never has, and never will, function the way we're led to believe in school.

Even if I had been better prepared for the job, there are certain aspects of the political process that cannot be identified or experienced from the press gallery. Now that I've been on the inside, I'm in a better position to understand what's going on, and to translate it for others. If more reporters would take this approach to their professional development, they'd be doing themselves—and their audiences—a big favor.

Because of the small size of legislative districts in states like Maine (7,500 residents per House district; 33,000 per Senate district), the legislators know many

John Diamond, formerly the majority leader of the Maine House of Representatives, is now a television reporter in Bangor, Maine.

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of their constituents personally, as friends, neighbors, and relatives. Yet when it comes to politics, common bloodlines and property lines are usually obscured, and elected officials take a lot of hostile fire. Most office-holders and seekers accept this adversarial flavor of the job as the cost of the attention, gratitude, and influence public service promises.

But it's undeniable that state legislators often find themselves dealing with voter harassment. Not long ago, a man appeared on my doorstep at 2:30 a.m. wanting to discuss a dispute he was having with a state agency. "The Nightstalker," as I now call him, made no apologies for infringing on my bedtime. Instead, he proceeded to outline—in great detail—the problems he was having.

Irritated by this visit but conscious of the man's status as a potential voter, I asked what motivated him to choose to come at such an odd hour. He indignantly replied that he was concerned that I might be too busy to meet him during the day.

Listening to and assisting constituents with bureaucratic hassles is a critical part of the job. Because of the potential for reward at election time, many legislators choose to focus their attention on this listening-post role. As a result, helping constituents obtain driver's licenses and performing other forms of red-tape cutting often takes undue priority over policy-making responsibilities.

From a political perspective, this makes sense. After all, people vote; law books don't. But I was surprised to learn that this pressure to give good service causes many members—about 20 percent of the ones I know—to leave the lawmaking to the party leaders and other legislators. Partly because of this, some Maine representatives never bother to read the bills. Outside of their own committee workload (heavy for some, hardly worth noting for others), the extent of their contribution to the legislative process consists of simply ratifying the decisions of others.

This delegation of authority—present to some extent in every state—is something few politicians talk about or even acknowledge to themselves. Sometimes party leaders and their staff assistants rebrief individual members on why those members voted for a bill. This refresher course can take place weeks, days, or even just *hours* after the vote.

In Maine and most other states, legislative leaders—especially the presiding officers of the Senate and House—formulate policy, and control all spending, personnel decisions, and the fate of most bills. While in some instances laws and legislative rules ascribe these powers, much of this control is inherent in the leadership positions themselves. Once members are elected to leadership positions, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to dislodge them (unless, as in the Wright case, there are strong, outside considerations);

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the influence a leader has over committee assignments, passage of bills, legislative travel, and other perks is usually sufficient to ward off any attempted revolts.

> Despite his hostility toward me and my politics, the writer left me with a message: "P.S. My parents send their regards."

But political clout does not rest solely with the officeholders. As soon as I entered politics, I saw the enormous influence lobbyists have. At bottom, a lobbyist's power comes from the ability to provide information on issues, to mobilize clients and members in support of or opposition to a bill (or individual), and to steer campaign resources towards particular parties and candidates. Lobbyists know what stirs the politician and the process, and they play mixmaster.

The successful lobbyists are well aware of a legislator's need to feel productive, and of a party leader's responsibility to help caucus members fulfill this need. In recognition of this, they cultivate professional and personal relationships with legislators. Upon my election as assistant majority leader of the Maine House, many lobbyists made hurried attempts to befriend me. Their fondness for me seemed even greater two years later, when I was elected majority leader.

One of my earliest encounters with lobbyists in my role as a party leader reflected the discomfort I felt with some of them. Just after I was first elected, a representative of a number of business interests came to my office, doling out perfunctory praise and pledging his services as a resource. After completing his warm-ups, he laid out his clients' legislative agenda for the year, not requesting my support but presuming I would provide it.

I was offended. I responded with a condemnation of special interests that could have been lifted right out of The Official Common Cause Attack Manual. After hearing me out for a minute or so, the lobbyist finally lost *his* composure and attempted to set me straight.

Not only was I ignorant about the process, he said, but his clients had contributed substantially to Democratic candidates during the recent election. He claimed that with their help, the Democrats had been able to maintain control of the House. He and they deserved more respect than I was showing.

The lobbyist's response wasn't totally unreasonable. After all, he was only attempting to exercise his right to influence a politician's vote. But I've never felt comfortable with the way politicians remain dependent on lobbyists to fund campaign efforts. That's basically why I threw him out of my office.

But lobbyists and their clients do indeed play a role in legislative elections. Both Democrats and Republicans in Maine regularly put the squeeze on special interests for campaign financing. Some, like the environmental lobby, resist. Most, however, go along with the milking.

Spit shines and sell-outs

At a recent national legislative conference in Reno, a small group of us were sitting poolside after the day's session, swapping stories. One veteran legislator mentioned that he'd spent a fair amount of time in the attractive home of a prominent Maine lobbyist. The legislator, teased in the past for his hero-worship of this highly successful lobbyist, was asked what in the world he was doing there.

He was, he explained, watching television and shining the lobbyist's shoes.

Lobbyists know what they're doing. No matter how much one might claim that contributions, friendships, and favors are irrelevant, it's intellectually dishonest to argue that they play no role in the way one evaluates—consciously or subconsciously—the merits of a proposal. This psychological impact may escape some who receive—but never those who give.

But sometimes this approach can backfire. During my 1986 campaign, I received a sizable unsolicited campaign contribution from an association of oil dealers. The lobbyist who hand-delivered it to me explained that, although I had not voted with his organization once during the six years I had been in the legislature, its members wanted me to have the contribution "because of your willingness to listen."

I accepted the check. But from that point on, I was so fearful of being accused by others of "selling out" that I never supported the oil lobby's positions. □

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Why America Loves Letter Carriers and Hates Postal Clerks

Killer Dachshunds, I-Love-Lucy machines, airborne snipers, men in glass cages, Pinkertons, goons, and whips—and other tales from behind postal lines.

by Jason DeParle

The post office looks like something Walker Evans photographed during the Depression, and the customers seem to have been waiting in line ever since. Their queue of sad faces pushes back to a wallful of Wanted posters. Gaze behind the counter and behold: the American postal clerk.

"And on top of that I have only six thousand, five hundred, forty-two days to retirement. . . ." he boasts to an idle colleague.

"Uh, I'd like to send some Express Mail letters to. . . ." a customer meekly begins.

"We don't go there," the clerk snaps. *"And with the insurance plan and other little tidbits, that adds up to a nice piece of change, don't you see?"*

"Uh, what about. . . ."

"We don't go there," the clerk insists. *"Evelyn and I—you know Evelyn—. . . ."*

In rushes the voice of Federal Express, promising better service to more cities, and the commercial cuts to its close: the annoyed clerk snapping down a shade over the barricaded patron's outstretched hand.

"The low road," howled the Postal Service, when the commercial hit the air seven years ago. "Malicious," said the clerks union. Under fire, NBC stopped running it, and Federal Express returned to its "absolutely, positively overnight" pitch. In the aftermath, the ad's architects professed surprise over the clamor. But it's easy to see why it hit home: in 30 seconds, the commercial conjured more than 100 years of American angst over postal clerks.

Who doesn't have a tale to tell of postal clerk woe? *Reader's Digest* tells the story of the clerk whose contemptuous toss landed a customer's stamp on the floor; the customer picked up the stamp, placed a coin on the floor, and left. Jane Austin, a syndicated columnist, writes of her encounter, after a 22-minute wait, with "Gubment Gert":

"I'd like this to go registered mail," Austin said.

"Nope," replied Gert. "Not with that shiny tape on it."

But Austin had already asked about the wrapping code. "No one told me about shiny tape," she said. "You said 'no paper, no string.'"

"And no shiny tape on registered mail," Gert said. "No cellophane tape. No masking tape. No shiny tape. Paper tape. . . Next!"

"Do you have a brochure or an instruction sheet?"

Jason DeParle is an editor of The Washington Monthly. *Anita Bose and Eric Senunas provided research assistance for this article.*

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"What?" said Gert. "Why would we have instruction sheets? Just no paper, no string, and no shiny tape. Next!"

I have a minister friend whose contribution to the genre of postal clerk encounters dates back several years, when he went to a Connecticut post office to mail a bundle of church newsletters, a duty usually performed by his secretary. He completed the bulk mail form, but unsure of the weight per piece, he stepped up to the window and asked the clerk to weigh the newsletter. What he got instead was a lecture on the separation of church and state. "He flew into a tirade, and said the post office was not in the business of supporting churches," my friend recalls. There was no one behind him in line.

Dastardly editorials

One interesting thing about the rude clerk stories that circulate from friend to friend is how starkly they contrast with another set of postal anecdotes: the letter carrier as hero. You know—the person who hands you your mail with a smile, who pulls your cat from the tree, who braves fires and foils criminals to rescue the feeble and frail. For every story that circulates of poor window service, there seems to be an equal and opposite one of letter-carrier courtesy or outright heroics.

In Satellite Beach, Florida, carrier Gary Craycroft was on his break when he saw an empty car rolling toward a gas pump where a elderly woman was filling up; he jumped inside, yanked the steering wheel, and cleared the pumps—breaking two ribs and injuring his leg and arm in the attempt. In Pittsburgh, postman Thomas Breit noticed that the mail of an 81-year-old woman on his route had begun to accumulate. Poking around the back of the house, he found the door open, the television on, and the woman stuck in an upstairs bathtub—where she'd survived for three days by drinking tap water. In Michigan City, Indiana, George Tadros was responsible for saving the lives of *two* elderly people in a single day. There's scarcely a newspaper in the country that hasn't profiled a local carrier, whether for a special act of courage or simply for longstanding community service.

Excuse me, but is there a pattern developing here?

Of course, with 275,000 letter carriers and 296,000 clerks, there are plenty of exceptions. On one side, there's Deena Disharoon, an Alexandria, Virginia clerk who saved a 78-year-old stroke victim by calling the woman's neighbors after she failed to pick up her mail several days in a row; the neighbors found her lying on the kitchen floor. On the other, there are the 11 Brooklyn postmen charged with dumping 60,000 letters in a trash bin—one way to lay your burden down. And the public's experience with postal employees varies with geography, with residents of small towns tending toward a loftier view of carrier and clerk alike.

Still, the Postal Service's own data indicates that the differences between carrier and clerk are rooted in more than the imagination of the Federal Express ad agency. Employee surveys show carriers with a higher commitment to their jobs. Statistics on union grievances show clerks to be more frequently disgruntled. And the Postal Service's current ad campaign—the smiling carrier handing over a letter—shows that postal executives know in what image their marketing strength lies. "The letter carrier is viewed as a national icon," says Anne Robinson, who heads the Postal Service's office of consumer complaints. "Letter carriers are, generally speaking, better adjusted and happier in their jobs. Clerks, on the other hand, have a whole different set of pressures."

The personality split between clerks and carriers is clearest of all when looking at the behavior of their respective unions.

The personality split between clerks and carriers is clearest of all when looking at the behavior of their respective unions. Both Vincent Sombrotto, president of the National Association of Letter Carriers, and Moe Biller, head of the American Postal Workers Union, have roots as union militants. Both came to national power with vows to toughen the union stance toward postal management. These days, though, Sombrotto is playing the role of union statesman. He's enamored of words like "cooperative" and "participative." He keeps a book by Michael Maccoby, the guru of participative management, on his desk, and sits on the board of Harvard's Program on Technology, Public Policy, and Human Development, which Maccoby directs. Biller, on the other hand, continues to sprinkle his speech liberally with references to "Pinkertons," "goons," and "whips." When I asked him what he thought of the Postal Service's plans to increase cooperation on the shop floor, he said, "I can sum it up in one word: bullshit."

Recently, the postal management's proposals for a more cooperative workplace have spawned a war of words between the two unions. Sombrotto helped design the employee involvement plan, which he and

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postal executives say can help take the edge off a corporate culture that all agree is overly authoritarian. Biller, who represents not only the clerks who sit at postal windows but also the much larger number who work behind the scenes sorting mail, has scorned the plan as a union-busting trick. That's a crock, says Sombrotto. "The view that we have to choose between a unionized workplace and a participative workplace is pure nonsense," he recently wrote in a union publication. "It is a view of those whose minds are imprisoned in a time warp—perhaps the 1930s. . . . the old ways are not necessarily the best ways." The clerks' retort? "Dastardly," wrote William Burrus, the union's executive vice president. Such remarks "are more befitting a representative of the Postal Service."

> When I asked him what he thought of shop-floor cooperation, he said: "I can sum it up in one word: bullshit."

The differences between carriers and clerks, individually and in unions, are interesting for several reasons. (There is, after all, clerk and carrier—surly despot and helpful servant—in us all.) For one, their experiences as individual workers offer insights into what brings job satisfaction and what breeds job frustration—spend a day with each, and watch what they do. For another, their relations with management provides a window into the beleaguered Postal Service's problems and solutions—how it managed to alienate a workforce, and how it might help motivate it. And, finally, their stances as unions mirror a split more generally within American labor, between those who view labor and management as inevitably confrontational and best kept separate and those seeking a greater decision-making role for workers. The battle over employee participation is one being played out not only in the Postal Service but in auto plants, steel mills, and on lots of other shop floors.

The killer Dachshund

In search of the letter carrier mystique, I recently paid a visit to Zip Code 20003, Route 325, which serves a cluster of public housing projects and low-income townhouses in Washington, D.C.. Route 325 is one of 41 routes that operate out of the Southwest Station post office. It's also considered one of the least desirable, because it covers a rough neighborhood and requires climbing a lot of steps. Since routes are distributed according to seniority, this one has fallen to one of the branch's most junior members, 28-year-old Leon Turner.

Like Robert Townsend in *Hollywood Shuffle*, Leon is a young black man whose mother insisted that he seek postal employment. Leon graduated from high school in Seat Pleasant, Maryland, where he was a basketball star (his teammate, Thurl Bailey, now plays for the Utah Jazz), and Leon played a few years at St. Mary's College in Maryland. He was working as a bank teller when his mother learned that the postal exam was being offered and urged him to sign up. Leon waited four years until a job finally came open.

People in Leon's neighborhood like him. "You're the best person around," a secretary said when he walked into the office to hand her the mail. A few days earlier, for Leon's birthday, a woman on his route had baked him a lemon cake with chocolate icing. A neighborhood basketball team recruited him for league games played at the Navy Yard, and, as we were walking, Leon's coach drove by and made sure he was ready for that evening's game.

To walk the streets with Leon Turner is to behold an artisan of neighborhood idiom. "Hey now, moving kind of slow," he yelled to the survivor of a long night's drinking. "Save you a trip," one woman said, leaning over a rail to spare him a flight of steps; "I heard something in that," he said. Leon stopped twice to tell teenagers they ought to be in school; he knew whose screen doors were locked; he slipped away from the whispered overtures of a young woman in a clinging yellow dress who approaches him regularly for money. "Drugs," he said.

That's not to say that the carrier of Route 325 wins the Snow-nor-Rain-nor-Gloom-of-Night Award. Gazing at the tangled growth that blocked the way to one seemingly abandoned house, Leon decided the water bill could wait. "I don't feel like stepping over trees today," he said. He skipped another house when he saw the screen door open, worried that the family dog would come bounding out. "Regulations say if we're in physical danger due to an animal, we don't have to deliver," he said. As we made our way a few doors down, I was still picturing the beast's bared teeth—Doberman, no doubt—when the physical danger himself came yipping out: a Dachshund. We would have had to backtrack only 10 yards or so to hand the Dachshund owner her mail, but Leon pushed on. "I'm on the road," he said.

Some of the reasons Leon likes his job are obvious. People treat him well, and since he deals with the same ones every day, he's got an incentive to treat them well,

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too. (Who bakes cakes for postal clerks? Who hands them Christmas bonuses?) He likes having his mind free to wander—"from one subject to another: my bills, my home, my girlfriend, my basketball game." He enjoys being outside, and he enjoys, as he puts it, "looking at the ladies—I met a few ladies, oh yeah." And there's a dignity to delivering the mail. "You seem to get more respect as a letter carrier than a bank teller," he says.

There's one more thing that, by most people's compass, gives letter carriers an advantage over postal clerks: they have more autonomy. Once they hit the streets, they're basically on their own, beyond the supervisor's gaze.

I didn't fully appreciate the benefits of that until I spent an early morning inside the Southwest Station. All in all, boss and bossed appeared to get along, and the manager seemed well liked. (From the put-your-request-in-writing screening of the postal p.r. people, it was clear they weren't letting me tour any hotbed of discontent. My request to spend a few days at D.C.'s main post office, a cavernous, block-long building, was declined on the grounds that "there isn't enough room.") Still, it was easy to see how the Postal Service has gained notoriety for its military manner. "Turner, go back to your [station]," the manager barked, after Leon had wheeled his dolly of mail out to his truck; he apparently wanted me to observe Leon from the starting line. "Turner, take 310," he said, by way of telling him to exchange vehicles with someone—not, "Leon, borrow Charlie's truck." Other signs of regimentation abound. The letter carriers report in at 6:00 a.m. to begin sorting the mail, which is already broken down by route, into the order in which it's delivered. From 7:00 to 7:10 they get a juice break. At a 7:30 announcement, all 41 of them file out for a vehicle check—start your engines, check your flashers, flip your wipers, etc. Their routes are mapped out so precisely that any odometer variance of more than two-tenths of a mile must be explained. Carriers aren't "free" by a long shot, but, with about half their day spent on the streets, they're a lot freer than clerks. "It's more stressful inside, because you have people watching over you all day," Leon says.

Discarded water slides

Clerks, of course, have no such escape valves built into their day. It's not hard to venture a few guesses about why manning the windows would breed a more surly disposition than walking a route. If a carrier works faster, he finishes earlier and dallies around; if a window clerk works faster, he or she just works harder. The carrier who sees the same people every day has an incentive to ask how they're doing. The

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clerk who asks extraneous questions is only going to antagonize the rest of the people in line—and since he usually doesn't know the customers anyway, who cares how they're doing?

While most of us think about clerks as the people at the post office window, they comprise only about 20 percent of the workers represented by the clerks union. The other, more numerous, clerks work behind the scenes, at a variety of jobs that mostly involve sorting the mail—some by hand, some by automated machine. Since job assignments are usually based on seniority, and the window jobs are, generally, the most prized, clerks may have to spend years, even decades, at mail-sorting tasks before having the chance to bid on a window spot. This system makes longevity, not congeniality, the prime qualification for customer contact.

Not long after I visited the Southwest Station, I made a trip to D.C.'s general mail facility, where the city's main sorting is done. With 3,050 employees, this is Clerk Central, and unlike Leon Turner's neighborhood, not a place of lemon cakes and "looking at the ladies." Wandering around the floor of the 661,000 square foot building—about 12 football fields if you count the end zones—I felt like I was on the set of a Steven Spielberg film of the Industrial Revolution. Machines everywhere whirred and beeped and screeched and hummed; robots pulled trailers of mail.

The building is so large that the aisles go by street names. Standing at 9th and R, I watched a team attempt to smooth the kinks from a new small parcel sorter—kind of a 50-yard-long octopus, with conveyer belts for tentacles. The belts suck packages up to an elevated platform, where clerks punch in zip codes, then swoosh them away to different coded bins. If you stand on that platform and look to your right, you'll find a companion beast: a series of 30 large green chutes, spaced over 100 yards, dangling down from the ceiling. They look like discarded water slides from a defunct Wet-n-Wild. This is a sack sorter. On top of it, perched a full story above the shop floor, a woman in work gloves and a baseball cap punched in zip codes and loaded mail bags onto a conveyer belt; sensor-activated "doors" then swept them off the belt and into bins the size of Dempsey Dumpsters. Elsewhere on this hi-tech horizon, clerks were feeding letters into machines that read zip codes at a rate of 38,000 an hour—on one side of the feeder, a march of standard business envelopes; on the other, a spray of paper headed in 76 different zip-coded directions.

Most of this machinery is self-paced. That is, workers can stop the conveyer belt or momentarily speed or slow the mail they load on top of it. *They* feed *it*. Perhaps the most brutal device on the floor, however, works exactly in reverse: *it* feeds the worker. This machine sends letters singing past at the rate of one per second, leaving about seven-tenths of a second to read the address and three-tenths to type the first three digits of the zip code. The clerks are expected to hit 19 out of every 20 letters that come flying by. They work in teams of 20, spending 30 to 45 minutes of each hour at the task and the remainder loading or sweeping. Though I had heard a lot about these machines, and looked at pictures, this portrait of relentlessness still shocked. It looked like the famous "I Love Lucy" scene in the candy factory. But this was no joke.

Martial mail

The differences in the daily work life of clerks and carriers—and the value of the carriers' extra autonomy—becomes additionally instructive given an aspect of employment that they share: the Postal Service's history as an authoritarian employer. "This is a top-down organization. I wish it weren't," says Anthony Frank, who took office as postmaster general 16 months ago and has earned high marks since. "The way things have usually worked around here is: 'You do what I say.'"

Explanations for the you-do-what-I-say ways vary, stressing both postal history and postal mission. As many have pointed out, the system was self-consciously modeled after the military, which was the only organization of comparable size as the early Post Office developed. Both organizations donned uniforms; both answered to a "general" in command. Others have stressed the political pressures for uniformity—mail must cost the same and move the same whether in Miami or Malibu. Will Shirk, a former postal executive, puts forth an anthropological view, arguing that postal form follows postal function: The heroes of the postal bureaucracy typically don't change things but *preserve them under adversity*—plowing ahead despite fires, floods, snows. "Anything that represents change in the basic operation is very threatening," Shirk says. "There's the fear that it'll kill you."

Whatever the cause, the effect of the Postal Service's martial laws is clear: lots of disgruntled workers. A 1983 employee survey by Yankelovich, Skelly, and White found that postal employees "are working below capacity" and "withholding a substantial portion of their discretionary effort." While this was true for almost all postal workers, it was true most of all for mail handlers and clerks. A major reason for the disillusionment, the consultants concluded, involved relations with front-line supervisors, who themselves had risen up from the floor and adopted the values of the authoritarian foremen who preceded them.

What these tensions translate into is a form of low-intensity conflict on the shop floor, with workers filing grievances, supervisors taking disciplinary action, and the two tearing at each others' throats in ways more

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than metaphorical. Postal management reports that more than 150,000 union grievances reached the arbitration level in the past two years alone (from a unionized workforce of 650,000 employees). Clerks, meanwhile, file grievances at a rate about 25 percent higher than carriers. Postal management, for its part, issued 42,000 letters of warning in a recent 18-month period, and 28,000 suspensions, according to the *Los Angeles Times*. And beyond paper, something blunter was exchanged: 355 physical attacks by workers on supervisors, in the past three and a half years, and 183 attacks by supervisors on workers. (This might give the "We Deliver" slogan new meaning.) "Tension and antagonism remain at an intolerable level in many work locations, and the number of grievances and arbitrations conducted is also intolerable," concluded a letter cosigned last summer by Frank, the postmaster general, and Sombrotto, of the letter carriers union. The letter pledged to reduce grievances by 50 percent. The clerks made no such pledge.

Postal Apaches

Evidence of "tension and antagonism" extends beyond statistics. In recent years, scores of postal employees have been killed or wounded by co-workers. If you thought the chills and thrills of mail delivery

WHO'S WHO

With the world waiting, and waiting to hear an eloquent message from **George Bush** about the recent events in China and Russia, his best speechwriter, **Peggy Noonan**, sits on the sidelines. Even though she wrote the New Orleans acceptance speech that was the turning point in the campaign against **Michael Dukakis**, insiders say she has not been asked to write for the president since January....

If you were pleasantly surprised by the president's environmental proposal in June, the White House staff member most responsible was **Nancy Maloley**. Her principal allies were **Bob Grady** and **Boyden Gray**....

During the past 15 months **Martha Seger** has been the only member of **Alan Greenspan**'s Federal Reserve Board to consistently advocate lower interest rates....

As of this writing, the White House's favorite cabinet member is **Richard Cheney**, the secretary of defense. The low man on the totem pole of esteem is **Manuel Lujan Jr.**, the secretary of the interior, who is threatening to make **James Watt** look like a statesman....

Last month we provided in "Tilting at Windmills" a tidbit about **Larry Higby** for Watergate buffs. This month we offer an update on the career of **R. Spencer Oliver**, the Democratic official whose Watergate phone was bugged. The recorded conversations were said to be more erotic than political in content, although it was determined that it was not Oliver but others in his office who were doing the dirty talking. He is now chief counsel for the House Foreign Affairs Committee and is said to be more careful about who is using his phone....

Democrats who are looking for **Lee Atwater**'s achilles' heel should consider this remark by his Republican rival, **Ed Rollins**: "The great thing about the chairmanship is what it has done for Lee's paranoia. Now he has real enemies." If they're looking for **Newt Gingrich**'s, one of our sources suggests they check whether the limited partnerships that were involved in his book publishing venture were in compliance with federal and state laws....

As to whether Democratic demonologists attempting to distinguish between Atwater and Gingrich are studying the way the two reacted to their respective employees who peddled the rumor that **Tom Foley** is gay: Atwater fired his, while Gingrich contented himself with telling his that she would be suspended if she continued to spread the story....

When **Marilyn Quayle** was asked about the renovation of the vice president's Victorian residence, she said, "I don't know anything about that. Call the Office of Administration." The caller did just that only to be referred to, in turn, the Secret Service, the Navy Department, the General Services Administration, the Department of the Interior, the Department of Defense, the Naval Observatory, the Executive Office of the President, the Office of Management and Budget, and back again to the Quayles. "No information was forthcoming," says the caller, columnist **Karen Feld**, "not even the name of the contractor."...

In—*White House:* Chief of Staff for the Vice President—**William Kristol.** *Agriculture:* Assistant Secretary for Science and Education—**Charles E. Hess.** General Counsel—**Alan Charles Raul.** Assistant Secretary for Marketing and Inspection Services—**Jo Ann Smith.** Assistant Secretary for Congressional Affairs—**Franklin E. Bailey.** *Health and Human Services:* Assistant Secretary for Management and Budget—**Kevin E. Moley.** *Veterans Affairs:* Assistant Secretary for Congressional and Public Affairs—**Ed Timperlake.** Assistant Secretary for Finance—**S. Anthony McCann.** Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration—**Ronald Ray.** Assistant Secretary for Veterans Outreach—**Allen B. Clark Jr.** *Agencies and Commissions:* Deputy U.S. Trade Representative for Geneva—**Rufus Yerxa.**

Out—*White House:* Chief of Staff for the Vice President—**Robert M. Guttman.** *Commerce:* Undersecretary for International Trade—**Allen Moore.** Assistant Secretary for Export Administration—**Micheal E. Zacharia.** *Agencies and Commissions:* Chairman, Securities and Exchange Commission—**David S. Ruder.** Chair, Interstate Commerce Commission—**Heather J. Gradison.**

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went out with the Pony Express and Apaches, consider: In Boston this spring, an angry mail handler commandeered an airplane and strafed the city streets with automatic weapons. In New Orleans last December, a mail handler shot his supervisor in the face with a shotgun and wounded three others during a 13-hour siege. In Massachusetts last June, a clerk killed a co-worker in a parking lot and later committed suicide. In Edmund, Oklahoma, Patrick Sherill, a part-time letter carrier, set a postal service record three years ago when he killed 14 and wounded six before committing suicide at the station. This was the third worst mass murder in American history. The list goes on—rather lengthily as it happens. (Son of Sam, you might remember, was a postal clerk.) A post office psychologist told me he couldn't read any meaning into such events without a control group, and perhaps he can't, but the rest of us could be excused for wondering.

It looked like the famous "I Love Lucy" scene in the candy factory. But this was no joke.

While the workers are literally up in arms, no one's accusing postal managers of excessive sensitivity. In Indianapolis, a supervisor placed workers with medical excuses in a glass cage on the shop floor—a warning that sick leave would be no picnic. In the wake of the Oklahoma killings, a postal manager warned workers not to read the sympathy cards on company time. Remember Gary Craycroft, the Florida letter carrier who hurt himself wrestling the runaway car from the gas pump? His supervisor issued a letter of reprimand, charging him with "an unsafe act resulting in personal injury."

Confronted with rote work and rigid supervisors, postal workers have done what unions in America have typically done: they've concentrated on seeking higher wages. And they've done so rather successfully. The average postal worker—clerks and carriers are paid on the same scale—now pulls in $27,000 a year, with another $6,000 in benefits. (The operators of the I-Love-Lucy machines earn about $3,000 a year extra.) By most studies' accounts, the standard postal wage is about 30 percent higher than what private industry pays for similar work. While Federal Express spends about 51 percent of its budget on labor, and UPS spends 60 percent, the Postal Service spends almost 85 percent. Ironically, this wage escalation dates back to the 1971 postal reorganization act, which in severing the post office from direct congressional control, was designed, in part, to control wage inflation. Postal workers were then paid the same as civil servants at the GS-5 level; if that held true today, they would be earning $18,000.

So postal workers earn a decent living—what's wrong with giving the working stiff a break? Well, nothing; the more money, the better—as long as the enterprise remains competitive. But, in part because the postal unions have traditionally settled for more money rather than a better work environment, what the Postal Service is getting for its high-priced labor is endless internal warfare: gripes, grievances, stagnant productivity—and threats of privatization. Outside its first-class mail monopoly, the Postal Service is getting walloped: UPS controls 96 percent of the small package industry; Federal Express and other private firms command 88 percent of the overnight mail business. For 11 of the past 16 years, the post office has busted its budget, and it's now kept afloat with about $3 billion a year in congressional subsidies.

If this combination of generously paid but unhappy workers fighting adversarial battles in endangered industries sounds familiar, that's because it is. Look at cars and steel. The clerks union is currently incensed at the Postal Service for an experiment in contracting out jobs to Sears, which is running mini-post offices with its own employees. But given the Postal Service's flimsy finances, it has to try something. Faced with high labor costs, a contentious union, and threat of postal abolition, what would you do?

The mailmen's microwave

Recognizing that the shop-floor wars aren't doing anyone any good, the Postal Service has made some moves toward diplomacy. The specific form is something called EI/QWL—for Employee Involvement/Quality of Work Life. It's purpose, as articulated by postal management, is to soften the adversarial culture by giving workers more say-so over activities on the shop floor. While the carriers speak rhapsodically of the process, the clerks union has greeted it with the enthusiasm usually reserved for, say, shiny tape.

Similar endeavors have been tried in lots of industries, and other unions have similarly split. While there's no hard-and-fast definition to employee involvement schemes, they typically include regular meetings on company time, between teams of workers and supervisors, to air gripes and offer suggestions. Critics say they're nothing more than a new sugar-coated way

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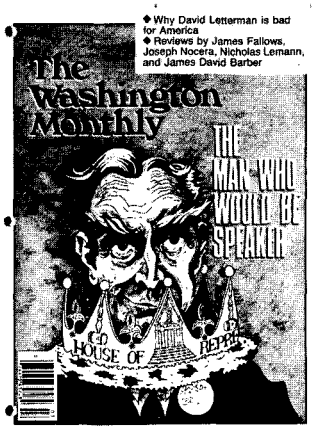
WE KNEW WRIGHT FROM THE START

The Washington Monthly

Three years before the downfall of House Speaker Jim Wright, *The Washington Monthly* warned its readers: "If Tip O'Neill seems like the sort of guy who would write out a taxpayer endorsed check to everyone who tried to sell him swampland in Florida, Jim Wright seems more like the guy selling the land."

And that's not the first time we anticipated the news that would later make headlines....



► In a story we ran six years *before* the Challenger disaster, we warned that the space shuttle was unsafe, saying, "Here's the plan. Suppose one of the solid-fueled boosters fails. The plan is, you die."

► Seven months *before* the stock market crash in 1987, we warned that programmed trading and low-margin stock options could turn a bad day into Black Monday.

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to screw the worker—to pit one worker against another in gripe sessions; to speed up the production line beyond what workers can reasonably withstand. In short, a union-busting trick in a union-busting age. And, in fact, they can be. But the call for precisely this kind of cooperation between management and labor has also come from people like Glenn Watts of the Communications Workers of America and Irving Bluestone of the United Auto Workers—scarcely union-busters. As they have argued, a union presence on such teams can guard against the erosion of rights, while expanding worker control and satisfaction. At Xerox, for example, an EI project helped raise attendance (from 92 percent to 97.3 percent), reduce grievances, and boost product quality (from 89.3 percent of shipments accepted by customers to 99.1). Did it oppress the workers? A Labor Department study concluded that "employees involved in the process saw it as helping them. . . ." Similar programs have helped the resurgence of Ford Motor Company, to cite just one other example.

The Postal Service launched its EI plan in 1981, after a particularly bitter contract negotiation. Sombrotto, the carriers union president, got involved and sought advice from Maccoby. Since signing agreements with three of the four major postal unions—all but the clerks—the Postal Service has established about 6,000 EI teams. Sombrotto remains enthusiastic. "People who have to work under conditions ought to have some say beyond what the union arranges for them," he says.

Down at the Southwest Station, where Leon Turner works, the carriers have been engaged in the employee involvement process for about five years. Its initial fruits were modest indeed: a microwave oven, a new door on the loading dock that makes it easier to transfer mail into the carriers' trucks. Eventually, a more daring idea arose: an experiment in self-management. The post office is divided into two zip codes. On Leon Turner's side, two supervisors oversee the carriers on 27 routes, scheduling their time off, keeping records of the volume of mail, and making decisions about when to work overtime. On the other side, 14 carriers now perform those chores mostly by themselves.

Broom handles and Bibles

Melvin Parker, a carrier with 19 years' experience, was an early enthusiast of the EI process and a proponent of the current experiment. As he explains it, self-management has produced two main benefits. The first is to reduce the tension over a major source of worker-supervisor friction: overtime. The Postal Service issues rough guidelines concerning how much mail a letter carrier should be able to sort and deliver in an eight-hour day, but there's lots of room for interpretation, depending, in part, on the mix of the mail. Not surprisingly, the supervisor's estimate of what reasonably may be accomplished in eight hours sometimes exceeds the carrier's—resulting in barked orders, union grievances, or harbored grudges. Under the self-management scheme, the carriers make those day-to-day decisions themselves, as long as they adhere to general overtime targets. "Now," says Parker, "you can iron out a lot of that stuff before it goes too far."

The bigger benefit, as Parker describes it, has to do less with the technicalities of mail delivery and more with its psychology. Parker describes his job in terms that would make Tom Peters blush: "It's just a much more comfortable, smoother atmosphere than if you have a supervisor walking around, keeping an eye on everything you do," he says. "Before, you said that's management. That's *their* post office. You can't do that now. To me, it's like when a company sells to its employees. You know whatever happens, you're a part of it, you're partly responsible."

No doubt, employee involvement schemes can go only so far. (Unfortunately, there's no room in government for the ultimate employee involvement plan—worker ownership.) You could put a Michael Maccoby at every work station, and clerks, for the most part, will still have worse jobs than carriers do. For the most vicious of the repetitive work, one humane solution is to open it up to part-time employees. There's a tremendous need for part-time work, particularly for families with young children, and sorting letters at one-per-second is certainly more bearable for four hours a day than it is for eight.

Still, there's something almost willfully perverse in the clerks' clenched-fist opposition to employee involvement. "I'm not interested in even having it work," Biller told me. Holding aloft the union's 219-page contract, he declared it "our Bible"—the only EI plan workers need. As Biller recounted a labor history of "company spies" and managers trying to "shove the broom handle up the guy's behind while he's working," I asked him what he would do to make life better for his workers if he were postmaster general. "I don't have to answer those kinds of questions," he said, "because I have no plans to become PMG." He is clearly happier where he is—on the labor side of the negotiating table, banging loudly for a raise.

That the workers aren't so happy seems clear. One needn't look far for examples of other industrial workers who followed the same hard-line, money-for-misery path as their enterprise went down the tubes, letting the bosses worry about the consequences; in places like Pittsburgh, some of them are now out of jobs, longing for the old days. If the forces of postal privatization have their way, postal clerks might be doing the same. More likely, the system will keep lurching along, propped up by rate hikes and subsidies, and trips to the post office will continue to be the stuff that Federal Express commercials are made of. □

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TIDBITS & OUTRAGES

HEY! LOOK AT THE KNOCKERS ON THE PIETA!

The Bush administration's nominee for ambassador to Italy, Pete Secchia, interrupted an interview he was giving to a female reporter from *The Detroit News* to tell her, "Look, I'm gonna tell you something, hon. You've crossed and uncrossed your legs twice and one time you showed me something I shouldn't see. Now am I going to complain that you're loosey-goosey or you got no class?" When publication of Secchia's remark sparked outrage, he explained himself this way: "I was just trying to make a point and she took it wrong."

THE FREQUENT FLIER MILEAGE WAS AWARDED TO THE NEXT OF KIN

Qantas Airlines admitted it lost track of a dead body bound for burial in Fiji and instead flew it around the South Pacific for three days with a cargo of vegetables.

HOW WE KEPT THE VIETCONG OUT OF MUNCIE

WHY BUREAUCRATS DON'T DO HIGH FIVES

The Chicago and Illinois governments were each in charge of building half of a $1.9 million, 210-foot, underground pedestrian walkway between City Hall and a state office building that they now confess does not meet in the middle.

TANKS FOR THE MEMORIES

Two former members of the Dukakis staff are selling a 35-minute video retrospective of the 1988 Democratic presidential campaign.

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Edgar Snow Told You So

Why China's Great Leap Backward should come as no surprise

by Jay Mathews

My friend Xu Wenli, a gentle, thoughtful electrician and former editor of an independent Chinese magazine, has been in prison in Beijing since 1981. His hair has turned white. His nerves are shot. He is unable to do much more than weep on those rare occasions he is allowed to see his wife and daughter, who is about the same age as my 16-year-old son.

I have thought about Xu often since I said goodbye to him outside his dank apartment in southwest Beijing. Yet in the nine years since, I have also celebrated, in print and conversation, the growing prosperity and democratic aspirations of China in the 1980s. I assumed that the reformist government of Deng Xiaoping and Zhao Ziyang would eventually, after a few bureaucratic bumps along the way, produce a much more flexible and responsive economic and political system, and that China would become, if not another Hungary or Yugoslavia, at least a country where reasonable men could catch the government's attention and change things for the better.

Now that I have returned from three weeks in China, where I saw the bodies and blood on Tiananmen Square and felt the terror that has closed minds all over the country, I wonder how I could have balanced such contradictory thoughts for so long. What is there about China that creates so much hope, among both Chinese and Westerners, in the face of so much readily acknowledged evidence to the contrary?

Edgar Snow, the premier China correspondent, perhaps the premier foreign correspondent, of this century, often found himself caught between two emotional Chinas, one dark, one light. That may explain the often schizophrenic nature of his dispatches, ably recounted by John Maxwell Hamilton in his thoughtful new biography* of the first man to report on Mao Zedong and the Chinese revolution that would change much of the world. This tension between hope and despair, pessimism and optimism, has perhaps been the defining characteristic of China reporting ever since.

Assorted warlords

Snow was the son of a Kansas City, Missouri, commercial printer. He studied journalism at the University of Missouri and then at age 22 succumbed to a feverish wanderlust. He worked his way by ship to Asia, traveling as a stowaway during one part of his

Jay Mathews, a reporter for The Washington Post, *served as the paper's Beijing bureau chief in 1979 and 1980.*

* *Edgar Snow: A Biography.* John Maxwell Hamilton. *Indiana University Press, $25.00.*

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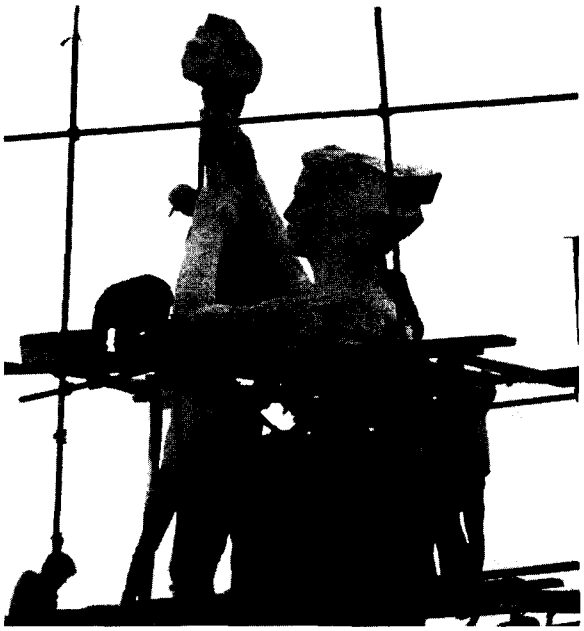

voyage, and arrived in Shanghai in 1928 to begin more than a decade of work as freelance correspondent and editor. He had no special knowledge of China, but loved to ask questions and take meticulous notes—habits that would become the hallmarks of his career. Shanghai, largely ruled by Western imperial powers, served as China's largest port and had been a refuge for all kinds of movements and reformers seeking to change the country. A year before Snow's arrival, much of the urban Communist leadership had been decimated in a bloody Nationalist massacre there, and the Marxists seemed to be in eclipse while Chiang Kai-shek and assorted warlords maneuvered for control of the country.

By 1936, Snow had moved to Beijing and had personal contacts in every one of the major Chinese political camps, but it was the Communists who most intrigued him. They had reportedly broken out of their enclave in Jiangsi province and gone on a colossal overland retreat that brought them safely to northwest China. This journey—the Long March—took them out of the Nationalist stronghold in the south and put them at a spot where opposition was weaker and where they could gain credibility as a patriotic movement by defending their turf against the invading Japanese. No foreign journalists had reached them. So little was known about them that some correspondents assumed Mao and his best general, Zhu De, were the same person.

After a spy-novel sequence of secret messages and rendezvous, Snow managed to reach the Communist base camp and fill notebook after notebook with the careful scrawl that became the 1938 bestseller, *Red Star Over China*, an account of a revolution in the making so original and absorbing it still sells well a half-century later.

Sewers and salons

But the contradictions in Snow's thinking were present from the start. The Chinese Communists Snow revealed to the world were using "the resources of energy, intelligence, patriotism, and economy latent in the masses. . . to the fullest" and had a system best described as "rural equalitarianism." Yet in contrast to what was often written by other admirers of Mao before 1949, Snow insisted that these same peasant reformers aimed to achieve "a true and complete Socialist State of the Marx-Leninist conception."

Similarly, when Snow revisited China in 1960 he praised the mass work projects of the Great Leap Forward, yet acknowledged that many of the eager, bright students he had known in the 1930s had been rendered incommunicado by the antirightist purge of 1957. He celebrated the 250 miles of sewers dug in the old, putrid nationalist capital at Chongqing, while failing to see the devastating food shortages that followed the Great Leap Forward. Snow had returned to China after a decade in which his byline virtually disappeared from the American press. The McCarthy era had left few readers in the mood to learn about communist improvements in Chinese health care and food supply. That made Snow, stubbornly independent as always, even more determined to write about them, but his resulting book, *Red China Today*, was widely ridiculed, and his self-imposed exile in Switzerland became permanent.

Snow returned to China one last time in 1970, when again his writing reflected two states of mind. He applauded the Cultural Revolution's assault on bureaucratism, but noted his profound skepticism about the stories of old friends—intellectuals and scientists—happily going off to the countryside to plant rice and slop pigs.

Snow's intense emotional commitment to China took forms that would violate the canons of contemporary journalism. He and his first wife (her pen name was Nym Wales) helped found the industrial cooperative movement in China and turned their house at times into a salon for young Chinese revolutionaries. He was a midwestern liberal with a marked distrust of elites in any culture and a strong preference for the views of ordinary people in his writing and his politics. American journalists of the current generation have less of his faith in the common man. Employees of large corporations and intense advocates of balance and objectivity, they (like I) would cringe at the idea of involving themselves in their stories as much as Snow did. Few have the independence Snow enjoyed as a freelancer.

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Nonetheless, the emotional commitment to China remains among today's correspondents, particularly for those of us who fell in love with the romance and intrigue of China's history, culture, and size when we were still in school. Chinese intellectuals in this century have been consumed by the tragic gap between Chinese potential and reality. Their concentration on ways to solve their country's political dilemmas has sidetracked a talent pool that might have produced more than just a handful of Nobel laureates. If Chinese themselves fell so easily into this trap, how could foreigners be expected to avoid it?

Thumb in Deng's eye

No matter how bitter I was about the way Xu Wenli had been treated, about the injustice of a lengthy prison term for someone who was less critical of the Communist Party in 1980 than some official commentators are today, I could not avoid staring wide-eyed at the fruits of Deng Xiaoping's new China—40,000 students sent to the United States (an American record for a single foreign country), new hotels with Cable News Network piped in daily, public opinion surveys, female weight lifters, Coca Cola, joint business ventures of every size and description.

When I arrived in Beijing on May 24 to help cover the Tiananmen demonstrations, I was still full of this sense of new possibilities. Martial law, after all, seemed a bust. The troops were so friendly or inept or confused that they could not get past the first few student barricades on the outskirts of town. Here I was taking a large, intoxicating sip of the same potion that had affected Snow—the amazement over improvements that blots out much thought of what has not improved or has gotten worse.

Like Snow, I was returning to China reporting after a long absence, and despite the martial law declaration, it was difficult to ignore the changes that had occurred since the restrictive beginnings of American press coverage in 1979. I could not get over the freedom of moving about the country without escort—hopping on a plane without reservations, chatting with students, workers, and even soldiers without prior clearance, going just about as far as my Chinese and my traveler's checks could take me. I chose not to think much about the plainclothes police who tailed me in Wuhan or the reluctance of my university friends to talk freely anywhere but on a walk around campus.

Memories of what had happened to friends a decade before did, however, create concern about where the student protests were leading. I thought the Tiananmen Square encampment was too large, too public, too much of a thumb in the leadership's eye. What I said out loud was that I was amazed at how far things had gone. Then again, I thought: Why should I worry? If Deng Xiaoping seemed ready to tolerate Hong Kong, a capitalist poison pill of unequalled potency, why not this? Thoughts of Xu's imprisonment made me silently applaud when some student leaders abandoned the square for quieter forms of protest. I thought the "Goddess of Democracy," the 33-foot statue erected across from Mao's portrait, was dangerously provocative, but

> This protest was occurring not because life in China was so bad but because it was so much better than before.

how could anyone not admire such daring and cleverness, coming just at the moment when the Tiananmen encampment seemed ready to pack up and leave?

This was a revolution of rising expectations, an outpouring of protest occurring not because life in China was so bad but because it was so much better than before and gave protesters hope they might have some impact.

When the bloody weekend came, June 3 and 4, the sense of helplessness among foreign onlookers was overwhelming, even though we realized we were part of a long string of similarly gut-wrenching episodes. In 1935, when a student demonstrator tried to break through a line of troops with fixed bayonets and police armed with Mausers, the police "began to beat her," Hamilton reports, and "Snow and Victor Keen, the *New York Herald Tribune* correspondent, rushed over hoping their presence would shame the police into stopping." The reporters in Tiananmen June 4 had even less effect. I ran in a panic from a volley of shots overhead. Much of that day seemed spent avoiding gunfire, and one young American journalist found himself in police custody for several hours with all the standard psychological torture—blindfolds, threats of death, pistols held to forehead, hours left alone and unclothed.

Given this traumatic blow to expectations of continuing reform in China, can we have any hope at all?

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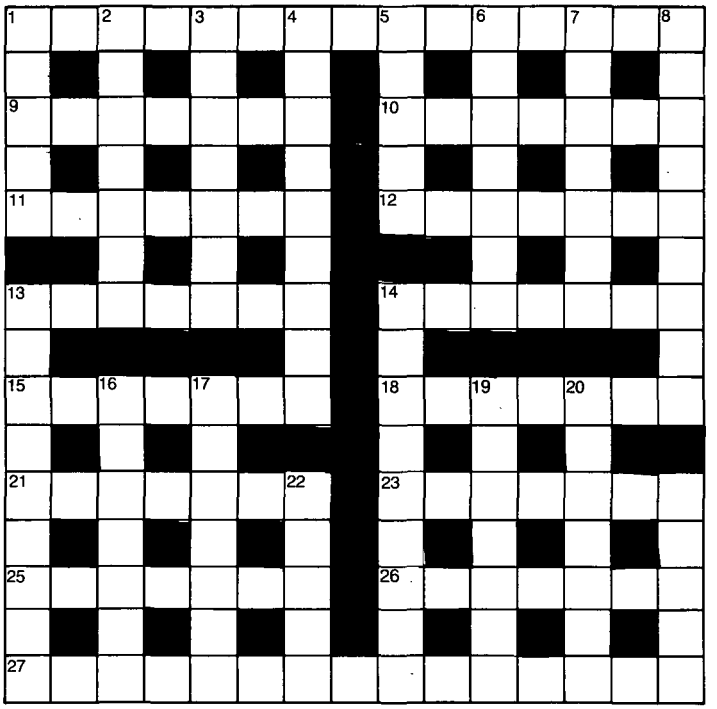
POLITICAL PUZZLE

by John Barclay

The numbers indicate the number of letters and words, e.g. (2,3) means a two-letter word followed by a three-letter word. Groups of letters, e.g. USA, are treated as one word.



ACROSS

1. Reform means quaint near demonstration site. (9,6)
9. Aquatic equipment loses strength around minister. (7)
10. Recorder played it 500 airs. (7)
11. Pixie led Harry briefly around stuffy one. (7)
12. Organized senior elite are unproductive. (7)
13. Study model to fall in line. (7)
14. Things turn funny after one keen observation. (7)
15. Real producers built stair around projectile. (7)
18. Disorganized red chap needs a drink. (7)
21. Flags displaying space symbols? (7)
23. Steers carefully around end of train and is hurt. (7)
25. Measure bird speed? (7)
26. Sea days recalled and tested. (7)
27. Tricky one perverts Senate for legislators. (15)

DOWN

1. Crudely mixed paste a factor in Richard's downfall. (5)
2. Home feature displaying conjunction element. (7)
3. Record time for producing real log. (7)
4. Usually adjust, *i.e.*, Denver zone twice with circle. (4,5)
5. Undies become superfluous if tossed without one. (5)
6. Shifty friends? (7)
7. Scattered grain is coming up. (7)
8. Begged to arrange detente with Royal Academy. (9)
13. Fish come in for craftman. (9)
14. Weighty brat putting scrap before worker. (9)
16. Play put boss in a fix. (3,4)
17. Cooked gratine for unappreciative diner. (7)
19. Takes a chance and skirts one revolution. (5,2)
20. Adding four, he'd have six wives? (5,2)
22. Play part around a hundred points. (5)
24. Teams set date after first of September. (5)

Answers to last month's puzzle:

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We find it in bits and pieces. In Shanghai, where I traveled the day after the Tiananmen massacres, authorities reacted with more restraint. They had plenty to provoke them. Workers set fire to a train after it killed six protesters. But troops stayed away. Barricades that had paralyzed the bus system were removed in the middle of the night by large numbers of unarmed police and workers. In that case, some of the arsonists have been given death sentences, but at least unlike at Tiananmen no innocent bystanders were killed by troops.

> Two dozen students watched "Falcon Crest," absorbing messages about the comforts of American life that may be as destructive to the Beijing government as any ban on sales of military equipment.

The arrests sweeping the country are certain to bring hardship and pain to many Chinese, like Xu and others arrested during the earlier democracy movement a decade ago. There is little good news here. But some of those protesters from 1978-79, when Beijing's Democracy Wall and several independent journals briefly blossomed, were later released. And the line on dissent has shifted often enough in the past 10 years to indicate some softening is possible, though not within the near future.

The long delay that preceded the attack on Tiananmen Square suggests that important members of the leadership are reluctant to use much force against the Chinese people. The lies they are telling about the massacre now provide a measure of how sensitive the issue is to them.

Whatever can be said about the uncertain American response to the protests, the fact that the United States exists as a source of uncensored news from all over the world has crippled forever the Chinese government's ability to lie convincingly about what it has done to its own citizens. Cheap, compact short-wave radios have brought the Voice of America deep into Chinese daily life. I watched about 100 students stand in the mud outside a dormitory room listening to a shortwave at 9:30 p.m. the night after the massacre, drinking in VOA's report on the Bush administration's reaction. At the same time two dozen other students in a different room were watching "Falcon Crest," absorbing messages about the comforts of American life that may be as destructive to the Beijing government as any ban on sales of military equipment.

The rusty gates to China that were just being pried open when I arrived a decade ago have not closed in any significant way. No one seems to have the power or energy to keep foreigners out or to limit for long the influence of Chinese who, if they don't favor democracy, at least support more *fang*, the Chinese word for loosening up. While one set of troops on the square was murdering workers and students Sunday morning, another was stalled at a highway intersection just four miles away, chatting with bystanders and munching on snacks.

We are in for decades of mixed messages, and like Edgar Snow, we will probably focus again and again on those we find palatable, leaving the rest to surprise us, probably unpleasantly.

The last two years of Edgar Snow's life were spent once again immersed in China. After returning in 1970, ill but eager for one last book, he became a living symbol of Beijing's desire for talks with the United States when the *People's Daily* ran a picture of him and Mao on its front page. In making this gesture, Henry Kissinger later wrote in his memoirs, the Chinese "overestimated our subtlety, for what they conveyed was so oblique that our crude occidental minds completely missed the point." Just a few days before Richard Nixon arrived in Beijing in 1972, Snow died of pancreatic cancer, attended by Chinese doctors dispatched to Switzerland by Zhou Enlai.

In his last book, *The Long Revolution*, completed after his death, Snow tried to cast off once again his old, distorted image as an apologist for the Communist Chinese. The book ended with a thought that probably merited more emphasis in his writings, and in those of the reporters who have followed him to Beijing:

"The danger is that Americans may imagine that the Chinese are giving up communism—and Mao's world view—to become nice agrarian democrats. A more realistic world is indeed in sight. But popular illusions that it will consist of a sweet mix of ideologies, or an end to China's faith in revolutionary means, could only serve to deepen the abyss again when disillusionment strikes. . . . [A] world of relative peace between states is as necessary to China as to America. To hope for more is to court disenchantment."

Nor is such hope likely to let me see Xu Wenli, or any of the brave Chinese who have followed him, any sooner. □

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POLITICAL BOOKNOTES

The Good Times. Russell Baker. *William Morrow, $19.95.* Russell Baker's latest memoir takes him from apprenticeship as police reporter at the *Baltimore Sun* to elevation, at age 37, to *New York Times* columnist. Considering Baker edged out future *Times* editor Abe Rosenthal (who wanted to write a column about Asia), Baker could be forgiven were he to display any retrospective smugness about his rapid rise. Instead, he writes about these years with utterly convincing self-effacement. Baker is deeply skeptical of the status obsessions of both small-time and big-time journalism. The result is a book that is even more likable than its predecessor, *Growing Up*.

Baker's true rival for success in journalism was not Rosenthal (whose name doesn't even come up in *The Good Times*), but his mother's first cousin, Edwin James, who was managing editor of the *Times*. "Edwin James was no smarter than anybody else," young Russell's mother would tell him again and again. Although Russell never had a chance to meet Cousin Edwin, his pompous figure loomed large in the family. Baker turns him into a marvelous caricature of all distant relatives whose undeserved good fortune brings endless grief.

Big-city newspaper reporters may be well-paid today, but when Baker signed up with the *Sun* in 1947, "newspaper work was for life's losers." Starting salary was a miserable $30 a week. One *Sun* writer broke a belt and couldn't afford a new one, so he came to work with a necktie around his waist. Political reporters were routinely lured away from the newsroom by politicians offering better pay. The turnover compromised the *Sun*'s objectivity, but allowed Baker to move quickly up the paper's ladder from police reporter to feature writer to chief of the London bureau.

Baker does a nice job lampooning the Anglophilia that was pervasive at the *Sun* (and remains common in American news organizations today). One editor went so far as to always request House of Lords gin for his martinis; when he visited London, Baker made sure to pick him up in a Daimler, the type of car Queen Mary rode in. While his pals back home were earning starvation wages, Baker, like all foreign correspondents, was expected to travel first-class and run up enormous expense accounts to demonstrate his sophistication.

In the early fifties, London hadn't yet become the completely pointless finishing school for newspaper reporters it is today; in the aftermath of World War II, it was still producing some news of genuine significance. But Baker ended up making his biggest splash with a piece about Queen Elizabeth's 1953 coronation—"just another color story," Baker admits. The greatest benefit of Baker's London experience was not what he covered but what he read. Exposed to the nonhysterical prose style of the *Manchester Guardian* (with whom the *Sun* shared an office), Baker purged his copy of journalistic cliches like "tense world capital" and "behind closed doors" and developed the gently ironic, unaffected voice that graces his columns today.

Returning stateside, Baker won another plum assignment—the White House. Especially in this television age, covering the White House is often viewed as journalism's big brass ring. In fact, Baker shows, it's a largely stenographic job. Even when a reporter got the inside line from a powerful aide, the result would commonly be "anecdotes illustrating the president's firmness, decisiveness, energy, alertness, glowing good health, zest for living, and a thousand other gee-whiz qualities." (Sound familiar?) Later, when Baker covered the Senate for the *Times*, he wisely avoided getting too cozy with majority leader Lyndon Johnson. This cost him scoops but spared him the straitjacket of "access." Nor did Baker become a "player," like his *Times* colleague, Bill Lawrence, who derailed a successful career as a political reporter by becoming too obviously close to John F. Kennedy—a cautionary tale Baker relates with clear-eyed compassion.

Baker stretched the boundaries of he-said-she-said daily journalism to accommodate his quirky sensibility, but in those days not much stretching was allowed—especially at the starchy *Times*. Finally wearying of "sitting on marble floors, waiting for somebody to come out and lie to me," Baker accepted an offer to write a column for the *Sun*; the *Times*, recognizing it was about to lose an enormous talent, called and raised the *Sun*'s bid by offering Baker the "Observer" column, which he writes to this day. Although obviously a gain for Baker and for readers of the *Times*'s editorial pages, Baker's departure was a loss to the world of fact journalism. Within a few years, the rise of the New Journalism created a niche for novelistic talents like Baker's, and in the years since, the possibilities for reporters to explore the significance of daily events have expanded further. Even the *Times* now finds room on page one for "off-the-news" pieces exploring issues and personalities, and, inside,

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its uneven "Washington Talk" page demonstrates at least some commitment to doing the kind of government anthropology of which Baker was a master. Given the narrative and reportorial powers on display in *Growing Up* and *The Good Times*, one can't help wondering what Baker might have accomplished had he remained in harness as journalism's rules were easing up.

—*Timothy Noah*

The Price of Admiralty. John Keegan. *Viking, $21.95.* At 4:00 p.m. on May 31, 1916, during the Battle of Jutland, one of the main gun turrets of the British battlecruiser *Lion* was hit by a 12-inch German shell. For the unfortunates inside, it was as if their world had been fired by lightning.

The gun-house crew perished instantly; one, as he died, involuntarily switched on the loading hoist and sent burning cordite into the turret's depths. Fire raced down towards the magazines. Only an order from the dying turret officer that the doors be shut and the magazines flooded saved the ship. *Lion* was thus luckier than its sister, *Invincible*, which blew into halves when one of its gun turrets was hit shortly thereafter. Out of *Invincible*'s 1,000-man crew, only six survived.

As the British military author John Keegan points out in his well-reasoned new book, *The Price of Admiralty*, such damage and death didn't have to happen. At the time of the Battle of Jutland, all Britain's capital ships had the same flaw: insufficient "antiflash" doors for preventing fire from racing through turrets and magazines. Keegan points out that the previously installed protective devices had been removed by crews "to achieve the highest possible rates of fire in gunnery competitions."

German warships were better protected. Damage to the battlecruiser *Seydlitz* four months earlier had alerted German admirals to the danger of turret fire. Their capital ships had antiflash protection, and while Jutland was perhaps a strategic German defeat, the exchange of big ships was three to one in their favor.

The lesson that turrets are a battleship's most vulnerable points has been brought home again to the U.S. Navy in recent months, by the gun explosion on the U.S.S. *Iowa* that killed 47 men. By peeling back layers of romanticism and dogma to expose what really happens in naval war, Keegan's book shows the roots of many of today's naval problems.

His lesson is that real military preparedness often revolves around mundane items and activities. Attention to turret safety is but one example. Another is the quality of torpedoes. Keegan points out that at the end of World War II even the best torpedoes were comparatively short-legged and inaccurate. Today some experts complain that U.S. torpedoes can't dive deep enough or move fast enough to catch many Soviet submarines. And as Keegan's chapter on the U-boat battles of the Atlantic amply demonstrates, submarine communication was a major problem in World War II; he says that it "remains an unsolved weakness."

Keegan's strength as an author has always been his grasp of what actually happens in war, as opposed to what movie convention and War Ministry propaganda imply. In his classic, *Face of Battle*, due for reissue soon in an illustrated edition, he took a series of land battles, beginning with Agincourt, and examined them to determine what men who experienced them must have gone through. The exercise leaves no illusion about the glories of combat, revealing it as a brutal and random business. Indeed, in his conclusion to *Face of Battle*, Keegan theorized that modern land combat would be so horrible that men would simply refuse to fight.

The Price of Admiralty takes the same approach. Four battles—Trafalgar, Jutland, Midway, and the Battle of the Atlantic—are examined in detail. The result is not so much a portrait of men at war as a study of change and counter-change. In Keegan's book, naval warfare seems a uniquely technology-dependent type of combat, with new generations of machines completely transforming the rules. Status quo means defeat.

At Trafalgar the innovation was tactical. According to Keegan, until this episode sea battles resembled World War I land battles, with opposing fleets prizing position and ignoring maneuver, content to slug it out line against line. Admiral Nelson successfully flouted this conception by sending his ships plunging into holes in the French and Spanish lines.

At Jutland the innovation was battleships. The first and last great confrontation of dreadnoughts, Jutland brought home the fact that technology had accelerated, that navies were vulnerable to defeat "in an afternoon" if found deficient in armor, gunnery, or flash protection. Midway and the Battle of the Atlantic showed how quickly entirely new ways of waging naval war—aircraft carriers, submarines—could rise, threatening the supremacy of nations whose old salts cling to old ways.

And today the U.S. Navy may be clinging to old ways. In the aftermath of World War II, the aircraft carrier came to dominate the U.S. fleet. But Keegan sees subs as the capital ships of the future, for the simple reason that full freedom of the seas, both above and below, rests only with them. By contrast, he judges conventional surface ships as "marginalized" instruments of military force.

Yet the U.S. Navy still clings to the big deck carrier, while, compared to the Soviet Union, the U.S. sub fleet is small. The arguments against carriers are by now op-ed cliches—too much of their strength is spent defending themselves, they're vulnerable to cheap smart missiles, etc., etc. It's notable that *Price of Admiralty* recycles none of these points. Instead it shows by accretion of historical detail what happens to navies that, faced with a choice in technology, choose wrong.

Unworkable technology has long been the nemesis of efficiency in all military branches. The U.S. Navy might well have turned the tide against the Japanese in the Pacific much earlier if its submarines had not been stocked with torpedoes that misfired at catastrophic rates. Then there's the Army's famous reluctance at the start of the Vietnam war to abandon the heavy and hard-to-control M-14 rifle, and its subsequent perversion of a viable preexisting design of a light, reliable one. Or the Air Force and Navy decision in the sixties to commit to a missile-only fighter even as Vietnam and Middle East experience was showing the necessity of guns in air warfare.

The adaptation of technical ad-

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vances to weaponry is a touchy business, one that must strike a balance between reliance on horse cavalry and a belief in silver bullets. Lately the silver bullet crowd has had the upper hand. But the ever-increasing expense of weapons technology combined with decreased funding makes choosing correctly all the more important. John Keegan's books show that weapons aren't the only determinant of the outcome in warfare, that training, tactics, and preparedness matter as well. Now that he's written about land warfare, naval battles, and military leadership, perhaps he'll turn to the most puzzling, inscrutable military subject of all—the Pentagon acquisition bureaucracy. Having seen Keegan masterfully evoke Trafalgar, I would like to read his account of a Defense Resources Board meeting.

—Peter Grier

A Gathering at the River. Fred Godsey. *Markgraf Publications, $28.95.* Poor Fred Godsey. Some guys never could get it right. They always believed it when the message from State Department Personnel was passed down saying, "Come quickly, we have an assignment for you we think you're going to like." Of course, just as dependably, they'd find Personnel had something in mind along the lines of, "You take this post in Chad for now and we'll make sure you get something good later." And after three years in Chad, sure enough, those same guys were on the boat to Burma. And the smart guys always seemed to end up in Paris.

I think Godsey must have been one of the gullible ones. He had such bad assignments, Personnel must have had him on a special list. Sort of the "Save for Fred Godsey" list. I'm surprised I didn't read in his book that he kept getting unsolicited bottles of champagne from anonymous donors in the European division. There can be only a couple of explanations as to how Godsey got stung with off-beat locales so many times. Either he is too nice a guy, or he knew what he was doing.

As you read *A Gathering at the River*—a collection of fiction stories rooted in Godsey's foreign service experience—it all starts to piece together. Sure Fred Godsey knew what he was doing. Who needs another book of memoirs from Paris? Tell us what's going on in Burma. Or Belem. Or Budapest. And that's what this book is all about. It's the seamy side of the world, where saints seldom win. While the future of Europe was being debated and duly recorded in London, Moscow, and Berlin, the stories were just as compelling at other spots around the globe. And for once we had someone there to jot them down.

Godsey's yarns range across the planet, from the dank and musty backwaters of 1940s Brazil to the rundown bars of Asuncion, Paraguay. He tosses in a few stories of communist brutality in Cold War Hungary. In every case, if there was local color to be found, Godsey's creative memory paints a picture of it.

Some of his tales relate cultural misadventures, such as the story of the California religious order that undertook a goodwill mission to Burma. The members' intent was to buy handicrafts for sale in the States. It was a noble gesture made with the idea of both supporting peasant craftsmen in Burma and raising money for the church in America. After butting heads with a number of Burmese customs, the rather straight-laced delegation concluded a deal and headed for home. But when the boxes were opened by Customs on arrival, instead of the expected trinkets, inspectors found hundreds of opium pipes and pornographic carvings. The Heavenly Tidings Mission almost landed in jail.

In a more serious vein, Godsey chillingly relates the terrible days of the communist takeover of Hungary. This includes an episode where Godsey's autobiographical character plots to kill a secret police agent who murdered a woman the real Godsey loved.

Like many other faceless State Department employees, Godsey just did his job, quietly making the paperwork flow. But this book indicates that he was different from his peers in the most important way. Here was one guy too busy with what was going on in the streets to be clinking cocktails after work with the rest of the embassy crowd.

In my nine years of overseas postings, I found bar-hopping with

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other Americans was often as local as most staffers got. Sometimes the closest thing to honest reporting you'd find was a rehash of the local papers, done over morning coffee in embassy offices.

But it seemed to me there was always at least one guy, probably somewhere down in the bowels of the visa or passport section, who just loved to hang out at the local hole-in-the-wall instead of the Marriott. And darned if he wouldn't rather talk about bullfighting instead of getting an office with a window. He was the one who could always tell you what was really going on.

—*Bing Semple*

The Intern Blues: The Private Ordeals of Three Young Doctors. Robert Marion. *William Morrow, $19.95.* It's well known that the worst part of a young doctor's ordeal is the internship—the first year out of medical school when he or she is sent to a teaching hospital. Work weeks average 100 hours or more. And most programs require every third night "on call." This means an intern works an entire day, straight through the night and on into the next day—about 36 hours—with rarely more than an hour or two of sleep along the way.

Robert Marion, a pediatric geneticist, shares the belief that internship is a grueling and perilous ritual. But what makes his book especially valuable is that it consists of the year-long journals of three new doctors who interned under him. The result is striking first-person evidence that the familiar arguments against the intern status quo are on the mark.

It is a testament to the medical profession's subtle, but powerful, system of rewards and punishments that the entire book is cloaked in anonymity. The names of the three interns, and just about everyone else, have been changed "to protect their identity" from, we presume, the wrath of the medical community. Even Marion himself draws the line at identifying the hospital where he works.

The three young interns, Andy, Amy, and Mark, start their year full of apprehension and anxiety. None of them believes he or she is ready for the huge new responsibility. It's not just professional fears. It's also worries about what a 100-hour work week is going to do to their lives.

Four months into the internship, overwhelmed by chronic exhaustion and immersion in death and disease, all three are displaying serious symptoms of depression. They've become apathetic and have, to a frightening degree, withdrawn from contact with the outside world. When Marion asks Andy how he's doing, he replies, "I can't talk to you, and I don't know if I'll ever be able to talk to you again. If I think about what's happening to me, I'll start to cry, and once I start crying, I don't think I'll be able to stop."

Soon the interns begin to resent their patients, whom they see as an impediment to home and sleep. As Andy cynically concludes, "The doctors who do the best with their own lives are the ones who don't talk to the families, who don't play with the children, who don't thoughtfully consider things."

For years critics have argued that internship is a pointless endurance test that turns idealistic young medical students into hardened cynics. But it was the issue of compromised patient care that finally made the public take notice. The fortress of medical education was dealt a severe blow with the death of an 18-year-old Bennington student at New York Hospital in 1984. Libby Zion was admitted to the hospital late at night with symptoms of fever and agitation. After assuring the Zions that Libby would be fine, the intern and resident caring for her sent her parents home around 3:00 a.m. A little after 7:30 a.m., the Zions received a call from the hospital. Their daughter was dead.

Libby Zion was the daughter of Sidney Zion, a lawyer and occasional writer for *The New York Times*, who had lots of friends in high places. Zion was convinced his daughter's death was due to mistakes made by inexperienced, overworked, and exhausted young doctors. A New York City grand jury agreed. They issued recommendations for major changes in teaching hospitals.

As a result of those recommendations, New York State has enacted regulations, going into effect right now, that limit the hours interns and residents can work. Other states, including California and Massachusetts,

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are also considering regulating intern and resident hours.

None of the patients described in this book dies as a result of a tired intern's negligence. But mistakes are made. Mark passes out from exhaustion while taking blood from a child. Andy falls asleep four times while interviewing a mother who has brought her sick child to the emergency room. In her rush to get home to her baby, Amy neglects to request a blood test.

There is little doubt that the current intern system does teach doctors how to practice medicine. At the end of their internships, Andy, Amy, and Mark all seem very confident and capable. But they all have also been embittered by their experience. The system has made them care less about their patients. "This last period of internship has turned me into a very selfish and self-centered person," admits Andy, the most sensitive of the trio.

This hardening of the young doctor's soul is surely the cause of much that's (often lethally) wrong with the medical profession. Marion includes many accounts of "attending" physicians (more experienced doctors who supervise interns and residents) who don't come to the hospital when called about a crisis. In one of his more horrible examples, a young boy who's had a kidney transplant comes down with complications requiring an operation on a Sunday. As Amy recounts the story, the "urologist refused to come in! He just refused to come; he said it wasn't such an emergency that it needed to be fixed on a Sunday night and that he'd be in the next morning." As a result, the boy spends an excruciatingly painful night and may have damaged his new kidney. In another incident, when a young child dies, the stricken family's physician never shows up, and an intern they barely know has to break the news to them.

Marion never takes a firm stand on reforming the intern system. But in light of awful episodes like these, the solution isn't very hard to figure out: senior doctors should share the burden. If each of the more experienced attending physicians would spend a couple of long days and nights a year at the hospitals that give them privileges, the problems detailed in this book would be eased immediately. Until such measures are adopted, however, the prudent reader will think twice before ever again admitting himself into a teaching hospital in July, the month interns begin their assignments.

—Elizabeth Stark

The Guide to the Federal Budget: Fiscal 1990. Stanley E. Collender. *The Urban Institute Press, $14.95.* How many tricks are tucked away in the budget process? Quite a few, it seems, after reading Collender's instructive book. We have come a long way from the days when the only important distinction was between authorizations (a vague commitment to spend money) and appropriations (actually empowering agencies to write checks). It is now also generally recognized that cuts must be discussed against the background of "baseline" budgets—that is, budgets adjusted upward for inflation. And with the introduction of reconciliation, sequestration, and impoundment, the budget process begins to resemble, more than anything else, a bad fairy tale of big government run amok.

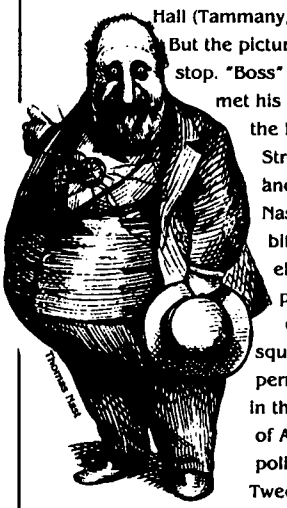
It all started when the Prince and his wife, Snow White-Prince, decided to get their first joint checking account. Since Grumpy didn't have enough gold ore to meet the minimum balance for an interest-bearing account, Snow and the Prince made him a signatory to their own account. That gave Grumpy limited budget authority—he deposited his money, but when he wanted to make a withdrawal, he had to check it with Snow and the Prince. The other dwarves knew a good thing when they saw it, and soon there were six more names on the checks.

Since the Prince wasn't very good with numbers, he turned the management of the account over to Snow. Now when Dopey wanted to buy a new pickax on credit, she'd authorize $100 for the pickax and appropriate $20 each year for five years to make the payments on it.

Unfortunately, so many people were now depositing and withdrawing on the account that when checks began to bounce, Snow realized that even she no longer had any clear idea of where all the money was going. In desperation, she tallied up their combined income, made her best guess as to next year's income, and divided the

"STOP THEM DAMN PICTURES"

That's what "Boss" Tweed demanded when he saw the handwriting on the Hall (Tammany, that is). But the pictures didn't stop. "Boss" Tweed met his maker in the Ludlow Street Jail and Thomas Nast put bitingly eloquent political cartoons squarely and permanently in the middle of American political life. Tweed aside, we think Emerson had it right when he said, *"Caricatures are often the truest history of the times."*



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total up among the dwarves. She didn't care what they each bought, so long as their projected expenditures came in under her allotments. Of course they never did. When each went over his limit, Snow had to take the proposed expenditures and cut them back until they matched revenues. Now the dwarves were overestimating how much they were going to spend because their projections were bound to get cut back. And since Snow hated to disappoint all those cute little miners, she more than once made her income estimates way too optimistic.

Pretty soon, strange and wonderful numbers began to show up in the "income" column—like the sale of the castle, which of course never took place. As time went on, the budget projections meant less and less. There was a $100 billion annual deficit, a $1 trillion total deficit, and it took a 179-page book by a Director of Federal Budget Policy for Price Waterhouse just to explain how the whole system worked. It was a good book—and very readable. But the process was still a fairy tale.

—Nicholas Martin

The Enigma of Japanese Power. Karel van Wolferen. *Knopf, $24.95.* One reason Westerners know so little about the way Japan works is that few of them can stand to live there for long. Witness the Bain & Co. consultant who opened an interview in Tokyo by telling me that American companies should send their best people to Japan and closed it by saying he couldn't wait to leave. That kind of thinking is fine with the locals. For all their talk about the need for greater outside "understanding" of Japan, most Japanese instinctively feel that the less we know about them, the better. In that respect Karel van Wolferen's book is likely to make any Japanese who reads it very uncomfortable. This is an excellent guide to the Japanese polity. You may wonder how van Wolferen, a Dutch journalist, could spend 15 years in a country that bothered him so much, but you won't regret that he did. His study of how power is exercised in Japan does more to explain the roots of the "Japan problem" than the work of legions of anthropologists, journalists, and political scientists before him.

What distinguishes van Wolferen's book from other broad-brush portraits of Japan Inc. is that it provides political rather than cultural explanations for Japanese behavior. The standard line, for example, about why Japan has so few lawyers—one for every 9,924 people, versus one for every 360 in the United States—and lawsuits is that the Japanese as a people are culturally disposed to avoid conflict and prize harmony. But as van Wolferen points out, "The judiciary and bar are kept artificially minuscule by strict controls over entry into the legal profession." Confirmation can be found in van Wolferen's observation that in a recent year only 1.7 percent of Japanese law school graduates passed their bar exam, compared to 74 percent of American ones. Clearly, the difference isn't the test-takers—Japanese students have typically excelled at rote learning in U.S. schools—it's the test.

Restricting access to legal recourse is just one of many ways in which "the System," as van Wolferen calls the powers that control Japan, keeps the people in line. Throughout Japanese history, any idea or force that threatened to disrupt the natural order of things was either crushed (like Christianity in the 16th century) or neutralized (like many American democratic reforms during the Occupation). Even today, expressions of dissent are tightly channeled and permitted only if they don't threaten the national interest. Labor unions notify management beforehand about when and where they will stage demonstrations. Gangsters call a truce when they realize turf wars are hurting their city's image. Presiding over all this is a network of government ministries, corporate conglomerates, elected politicians, and other groups that function as competing semiautonomous components, with no ultimate authority at their head. One thing the Japanese powers-that-be agree on is the need to preserve the status quo. Hence, van Wolferen asserts, they don't really believe in things like free markets and free trade, which introduce too many uncontrollable elements. The absence of a strong, accountable central authority enables the System to deflect not only internal calls for change but external ones as well. As van Wolferen says, "There is no place where, as Harry Truman would have said, the buck stops. In Japan, the buck keeps circulating."

A classic case of the circulating Japanese buck is the Recruit bribery scandal. Although it has triggered widespread popular outrage, caused the arrest of 16 influential politicians, bureaucrats, and businessmen, and forced the resignation of 44 officeholders—including Prime Minister Noboru Takeshita—it's unlikely to change the way Japanese money politics works. In fact if past history is any guide, Takeshita—who has refused to give up his parliamentary seat—is likely to retain considerable political power. Fifteen years ago, when Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka was forced to resign in the wake of the Lockheed bribery scandal, he stayed in the Diet and went on to secure his status as the most powerful postwar Japanese politician, engineering the appointments of several of his successors.

Van Wolferen, who wrote his book before Recruit hit the news, argues that the staying power of Japanese politicians and their general unresponsiveness to voters (as opposed to interest groups) makes the Japanese political system antidemocratic. But it's not clear these features make the Japanese way of governing very different from ours. True, in the United States, politicians like Jim Wright and Tony Coelho have paid for their moneygrubbing with their political lives. But now that they're gone, Congress (not unlike the Diet after Recruit), is ready to put the issue of ethics behind it—and resume life with a 98 percent incumbency rate, honoraria, and PAC money.

In similar fashion, when van Wolferen describes Japan's main pork-barrel enterprise, the public works industry, he doesn't seem to register the strong parallels with American practices. "For a construction firm to be allowed to bid on a public works project," he observes, "it must first bribe a powerful politician. It will then meet with all the other nominated contractors for a negotiating session, called dango, at which it is decided which of them will get the job. . . . The dango system ensures that all participating contractors get to work on a government project at one time or another." What van

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Wolferen doesn't seem to get is that by changing just a few words, that passage could easily describe the birth of the B-1 bomber.

Another infamous Japanese practice van Wolferen deplores without picking up on the Western parallels is amakudari, or "descent from heaven," whereby senior bureaucrats retire to join firms they once helped to regulate. Sound familiar? Even the life of the sarariiman ("salary man"), Japan's typical, blue-suited executive, has its equivalent in *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*. The days of the company man may be over in the United States, but they shouldn't seem entirely alien and conspiratorial. And although it may seem extreme that a Japanese maternity hospital would run ads guaranteeing admittance to prestigious kindergartens as part of a delivery package, yuppie couples in the United States would probably leap at the offer.

Underlying van Wolferen's critique of modern Japan is his assertion that the Japanese, unlike Westerners, do not hold "concepts of independent, universal truths or immutable religious beliefs transcending the worldly reality of social dictates and the decrees of power-holders." There are enough differences between Western and Japanese behavior to make such an assertion credible. But implicit in that judgment, and throughout van Wolferen's book, is the idea that such overarching values are the be-all of Western civilization, playing far more of a part in the daily life, say, of an average American than an average Japanese. Sometimes I wonder. Several weeks ago, *The Washington Post* ran a story about a young boy being killed by a classmate who wanted his expensive basketball sneakers. A few days later, the *Post* ran a front-page story about strict discipline in Japanese schools that expressed veiled shock about a student being slapped for bringing a hair dryer to school. While we may rebel at the Japanese school's strictness, it's implausible to think that it doesn't represent a belief in some sort of transcendent value, one flagrantly absent in a society where you can get blown away for your Reeboks.

Similarly, van Wolferen seems to go overboard when he cites as protectionist fervor a former government agriculture official's claim that he would find it inconceivable to lobby against the policies of his former ministry. Would that some of Washington's ex-officials had such scruples.

Like not a few conspiracy theories, van Wolferen's book ultimately undermines itself. His assertion, for example, that there are no strong leaders in Japan is somewhat belied by what he says about the powers of Kakuei Tanaka. Almost 10 years after leaving office, Tanaka suffered a stroke that left him incapacitated, thereby threatening everything from the stability of the government then in power to various public works projects in rural prefectures. Moreover, for all van Wolferen's insistence on the primacy of politics over culture, his explanations still tend to make Japanese life seem inscrutable and unique—no less so than the cultural explanations he dismisses at the outset.

Ultimately, for all its strengths, what's disturbing about *The Enigma of Japanese Power* is that it presents important truths about Japan in a way that appeals to our worst instincts. Politicians like Richard Gephardt will love this book: By casting Japan as a national economic conspiracy, it makes the case for U.S. protectionism look good. But as van Wolferen himself makes clear, the United States can exert considerable pressure on Japan to change its ways without resorting to out-and-out protectionism. Not only do we absorb roughly 40 percent of Japan's exports but we guarantee its military security and, by setting the terms of Japan's foreign policy, frequently shield it from diplomatic difficulties. For too long, we've allowed the Japanese to hide behind former ambassador Mike Mansfield's statement that "the U.S.-Japanese relationship is the most important bilateral relationship in the world, bar none." The way to persuade Japan to play a more constructive economic role in the world, and to assume some of the burden of its own defense, is to stop doing so much for them. With our markets and our military umbrella, we have considerable leverage over Japan, and van Wolferen's invaluable book shows us just how and where we should use it.

—*James Gibney*

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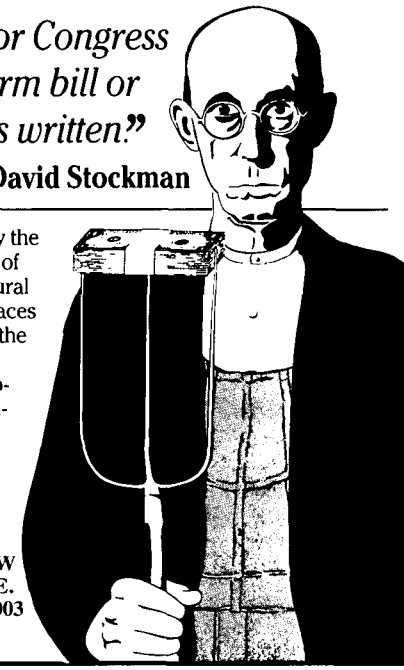

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